THE GOLD WOLF

MAX PEMBERTON

£1.

Walter L. Blake.

from Frank.

June 18th 1903.

THE GOLD WOLF

THE GOLD WOLF

By

MAX PEMBERTON

AUTHOR OF "KRONDSTADT" "PRO PATRIÂ" "THE HOUSE UNDER THE SEA"
ETC ETC

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAURICE GREIFFENHAGEN

LONDON
WARD LOCK & CO LIMITED
1903

TO MY FRIEND

DR. W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

CONTENTS

BOOK I

THE DOUBT

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Market and the Life	9
II	The Visit	15
III	Patrick Foxall at Home	23
IV	The Shadow of Fate	30
V	Man and Wife	42
VI	The Call of the Day	52
VII	The Pathos of the Doubt	59
VIII	Patrick Foxall Expounds	69

BOOK II

THE DREAM

IX	The Exile	81
X	Strangers at Castle Garth	105
XI	The Marooned	120
XII	Romer's Luck	134

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIII	"Danger"	146
XIV	The Magician on the Bank	160
XV	Face to Face	173

BOOK III

THE DARKNESS

XVI	At Sonning Court	182
XVII	A Message of Rubies	205
XVIII	The Shuttered Windows	219
XIX	Confession	242
XX	The Parting of the Ways	255
XXI	In Letters of Dust	266

BOOK IV

THE DAWN

XXII	The House in the Rue Marbeau	274
XXIII	Patrick is a Prophet	308
XXIV	Little Beryl Goes upon a Journey	317
XXV	The Pursuit of Courvoisier	336
XXVI	Justice	351
XXVII	Beyond the Valley	377

BOOK I

THE DOUBT

CHAPTER I

THE MARKET AND THE LIFE

A CLERK carried the last of the signed letters from the room, and Dudley Hatton was alone. The hour was half-past six ; the day a Friday in the month of July. Dudley remembered both the hour and the day for many a long year to come.

A week of financial storm and stress had troubled Draper's Gardens, and this was the crisis of it. During five short days poor men had become rich, rich men poor. In the House itself the markets rose and fell as Western cities—now to vast heights, now to ruins. He who quitted Belgravia in the morning oftentimes had done better to seek out Bloomsbury at dusk. The roar of trembling voices was like the storm and ebb of gales. The summer heat added frenzy to the panic. Dudley Hatton, knowing not at present what the outcome of his vast dealings had been, let the pen drop from his

hands and sat staring vacantly, unconscious almost of the place and the time. Through the open windows a message of the City's life came up to him; he did not hear it. The bells of the neighbouring churches, chiming the quarters, did not speak of the closing day. He sat as a man whose mind had failed him; who had known yesterday and would know to-morrow—but for whom to-day was not. Clerks, anxious to turn homeward, watched his brougham at the office door and wondered what kept him. Ah! did they own but a twentieth part of his fortune, how little would Throgmorton Street see of them! This man of riches fabulous, what kept him in that gloomy habitation of financial ghosts, when all the world was open to him—the playing-fields of Europe, the splendid East, the life-giving sea? And he was killing himself—killing himself hour by hour, and week by week. This last crisis had aged him beyond them all. The hand that took the papers from a driven secretary trembled like a woman's. Dudley Hatton was growing old. And he had lived but thirty-seven years.

He was growing old, his friends said; and yet none of them—Lady Hermione, his wife, least of all—knew how old. Sitting there in his office, with vacant mind and weary body, the discovering light of a setting sun gave to his haggard face deeper lines than any his clerks had seen. And there

was that in the eyes which no stranger might observe without concern—a look as of one seeking pity and relief, craving almost for some weapon against self; the look of a man who has lost life's battle and not won it. Yet Dudley Hatton was accounted the fifth richest man in the world. His income set unmathematical journalists sums they could not add. He was photographed, written of, interviewed as "The African King." "What a fortune!" the readers said. "What a dog's life!" was the comment of his friends.

* * * * *

A clerk knocked at the door of the inner office—the "unholy of unholies," as a jobber-wit had called it—and, failing to obtain an answer, he knocked a second time and a third time before the well-known voice cried, "Come in!" He found Dudley Hatton still at the great writing-table—the room half in darkness, the papers before him untouched. Afraid at the first that his employer was ill, the musical voice, the kindly manner reassured him and he advanced with confidence. Few that were in close touch with Dudley Hatton did not grow to love him. Even his enemy, money, could not deprive him of their affection.

"Well, Hardy, and what now? I thought you had gone home."

"I was waiting for you, sir."

"Quite an unnecessary attention, Hardy."

"Thank you, sir; but Mr. Foxall is here."

The lines in the man's face vanished in a moment. Such was the magic of a name.

"Mr. Foxall. What's he doing west of Temple Bar?"

"He said he had an appointment with you, sir."

"An appointment? an appointment?"

He took a note-book from his pocket and turned the pages of it under his thumb. When he found the date, the lines came into his face again, and the magic of the name had passed.

"Oh, yes! I see; there was an appointment. Let Mr. Foxall come up. And you go home, Hardy. Tell the others to go. I do not wish any one to remain after the letters are written."

The clerk said, "Thank you, sir," and left the office. You could hear the others trooping out like a pack of schoolboys before twenty seconds had passed. Patrick Foxall, however, went up to the "holies" three steps at a time, and the whole building rang with a voice which the hunting-field had trained.

"Dudley, me bhoy! where are ye now?"

Dudley extended a hand across the desk, and when Patrick had touched his cold fingers, he unlocked a drawer in the cabinet behind him and pushed a decanter of sherry and a wine-glass toward the

"wild Irishman." There were cigars already upon the table, and as soon as the great fellow with the scarlet waistcoat had lighted one, Dudley picked up a cigarette and began to tap the end of it.

"I've a dreadful memory, Pat."

"Faith! and ye have. 'Tis an hour I've waited in Harley Street this day."

"Pity it wasn't Bond Street, Pat."

"Go on with you—would ye speak of the hussies? Aye, but it's foolish talk. Say what kept ye, man—what kept ye from Chaplin?"

"Money, Pat."

"To the devil with the money! Is money putting flesh on your bones or giving ye sleep at nights? Ye'll come this minute—the doctor's waiting. 'Tis on guineas and symptoms the rogue lives. We'll just take a cab and make him a present of both."

Dudley smoked for a minute in silence. Then he asked—

"Do my friends think I am ill, then?"

"They don't think—they know it."

"And they are really anxious about me?"

"They pay ye the compliment of saying that they hope you won't die in a madhouse."

He did not see the swift change which came upon his friend's face, nor the look which haunted the eyes. The jest to him was immense, and his raucous

laugh could be heard in the street outside. Pat Foxall had but one supreme word of contempt for any drollery. It was his own and inimitable. "Bow-wow!" he would say, and that ended the argument.

"They say you're working too hard and will kill yourself, me bhoy. I'm taking even money about it, and a very pretty investment it is! Jan Beckstein—'tis like the old devil—is laying odds that you're down by Christmas. Pleased he would be, to be sure! Come, now, ye'll not give in to Jan Beckstein! 'Twould be the first time in your life if ye did."

Dudley struck the ashes from his cigarette and then stood up to look for the silk hat which was on the table beside him. In spite of the weather, he was always scrupulously well dressed, and the old habit of a frock-coat for town never deserted him.

"If any one brings me to an early grave, it will not be Jan Beckstein," he said slowly, as he opened the door for Foxall to pass out. "I've given him one to-day that he won't soon forget. Come along Pat; I'll see your man, since ask you me. But I warn you—it won't be even money when I come out!"

Pat Foxall stuck his hat on the side of his head and linked his arm with Dudley's. "Bow-wow!" was all he condescended to say.

CHAPTER II

THE VISIT.

DR. OLIVER CHAPLIN, of Harley Street, hearing a ring at his front-door bell, hastily thrust aside the evening paper, and opening a text-book upon an abstruse subject, sat down to his table and took a pen in his hand. When a sleek manservant announced "Mr. Dudley Hatton," his attitude was entirely professional and impressive. The keenest observer would not have guessed that he had recently returned from the golf-links at Northwood, where he had enjoyed an exciting argument with an eminent surgeon upon the merits of the new American ball. He was now all composed and wise-looking; and he merely bent his head, as a judge might have done, when Dudley entered.

"Mr. Dudley Hatton—I need scarcely say that I know the name."

Dudley cared nothing for the compliment.

"My friend, Foxall, wishes me to see you," he

said a little curtly. "I don't know why; but he is probably the one man in the city of London who can do what he likes with me. So here I am, doctor, and it's for you to do the rest."

Dr. Chaplin bowed his head again and took up a diary in which his notes of cases were entered. A shaded lamp stood upon his left hand. He pulled it nearer to him and looked at his patient over his glasses.

"You are a very busy man, Mr. Hatton."

"Yes, you may call me that."

"Attend at your office every day?"

"Yes, I am in London every day."

"And sometimes feel the burden of it? I am sure you do."

"If I did not, doctor, I should not be here."

Dr. Chaplin made a note in his book and then went on again. For the moment his questions were entirely commonplace—the age of the patient, his weight, his appetite—but presently he asked—

"Do you travel much, Mr. Hatton?"

Dudley laughed a little satirically at the idea.

"I was five times across the Atlantic last year, once to South Africa, three times to Berlin, as many to Paris. Would you call that much, doctor?"

"At least an evidence of the nomadic instinct. Let me ask if you take your business with you on these journeys, or manage to forget it?"

Dudley half closed his eyes and leant back in the chair wearily.

"Ah!" he said, "that's coming nearer home. I'll ask a question in my turn. If you have a dangerous case—a patient hovering between life and death, a great risk, a vital operation—do you forget it? Can you put it aside when you like? I think not, doctor; I think not."

Another note was made in the black-bound book, another glance turned swiftly at the speaker.

"I see, I see. You are engaged in great financial operations and you cannot free your mind of them. They are your ghosts; they recur in the brain again and again. You do not sleep, Mr. Hatton?"

"Sleep? What would I not give to sleep?"

"There is always a train of thought waking you. You imagine the rest. You rise early because you go to bed late."

"I rise early because I must. The impulse is driving me all the time. I must. I must! You can know nothing of it. I must wake and work. If I pause, the brain fails me. I am a drug drinker, and finance is my dram. That is why I am here, doctor. Give me sleep, and I will pay any price you care to name for it."

Oliver Chaplin put down his pen and drew the lamp across the table, that the light of it might fall upon his patient's face. He was a man of some

heart, despite his professional schooling, and this case interested him greatly. There was a gentle note of encouragement in his voice when next he spoke.

"If you will put yourself entirely in my hands, I will begin to make promises," he said kindly; "but it would have to be entirely, Mr. Hatton."

Dudley, half ashamed of his earnestness, became the cynic again.

"Meaning," he said, "baths, hydros, retreats, eh, doctor? A course for neurosthenia. Oh! I know that humbug!"

The doctor pulled the shade down upon the lamp and took up his pen again.

"I prescribe none of those things," he said quietly, "for such a man as you."

"Then what is it? what do you wish me to do?"

"To give up business absolutely, definitely, finally—for ever."

"To give up business ——!"

"I see no middle way. If you do not give up business——"

He paused abruptly, as though fearing to say that which was in his mind. An embarrassing silence fell upon both. Through the open windows they could hear a distant street organ and the rumble of traffic in Harley Street. A clock ticked

patiently on the wooden mantelshelf. Dudley was the first to speak.

"You were about to speak, doctor——"

"I was about to speak of consequences. Let me put it another way. I am assured you would not wish to conceal anything from me, Mr. Hatton. Your case interests me greatly, and, if you will permit me, I will make it my own. Regard me for the moment simply as the doctor and the friend. You would not resent a question in that light?"

"I am here to speak; ask what you please."

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the question came, laboriously and with not a little tactful adornment.

"This impulse to work and activity of which you speak, does it ever—that is—are there other impulses, Mr. Hatton?"

It was a simple question, but the effect upon him who heard it was, beyond all measure, surprising. Again there came to the eyes of the man that dangerous look which had troubled them in the solitude of his office. The hands trembled nervously, the face aged visibly.

"Other impulses—what do you mean, doctor?"

The response was unflinching. This was a case of which the truth must be known.

"I mean that nervous impulse takes many forms. When the system is unstrung, when we

cannot sleep or rest, Nature rings a danger bell in our ears. Men have come to me and told me, in this room, of the most ridiculous manias, which were simply the result of overwork. I have even known patients—common-sense, religious men—whom nervous strain has so driven that they have had the impulse to kill those dearest to them. We laugh at their fears, but do not pass them by. You know nothing, of course, of such cases as these, but there may be something, some trouble of your illness and mental distress——"

He paused, as though the suggestion were enough; but Dudley buried his face in his hands. He did not speak for many minutes. The truth, how wonderfully this man had divined it! The spectres, the mental ghosts of the last six months, how surely he had named them! And the terrible impulse to death, to rest, to forgetfulness! Dudley had not dared to confess these even to himself.

"Yes," he said slowly, "yes, I have known such cases, doctor. But I laughed at them. A strong man must do that, he must laugh at them. They are the penalty of his position. Work will kill them."

And then, as though uttering a resolution, he clenched his hands and said—

"By Heaven, it shall!"

The doctor watched him closely during this

paroxysm of nervous dread. A little fearful of the consequences of his question, he began to edge away from it.

"Come," he said, "you are overwrought, tired, mentally distressed. Nature is ringing the danger bell for you. You will listen to that, Mr. Hatton, for the sake of those dear to you, for your wife's sake."

For the first time since they had met, Dudley uttered a scornful laugh.

"For my wife's sake——!"

He checked the word which came to his tongue and rose abruptly.

"I will come and see you again, when I am better able to speak of things. If you think there is anything that will do me good, why, send the prescription on. It is your dinner-time and mine, doctor. Fasting will not help either of us."

The doctor, understanding the nature of this sudden determination, did not seek to dispute it.

"You are going to take a long holiday," he suggested brightly, "and to-morrow must begin it. My orders are positive. I shall come to Park Lane in the morning and see how they are being carried out. You can amuse yourself very well until Christmas, Mr. Hatton, and after that we will reconsider the case. But it is my duty to tell you very plainly that if you continue as you are going on, in six months' time——"

"I shall die in a madhouse, eh? Do not spare me, doctor; I know it."

Dudley laughed loudly at his own prophecy, and then, the laugh failing him suddenly, he repeated, almost as one speaking to himself, "I know it—in six months' time!"

He left the room impatient of the consolations offered to him. He, Dudley Hatton, had defied Nature's warning bell these many months. He knew the penalty.

* * * * *

As they went down the hall together, Oliver Chaplin bethought him of a question.

"By the way," said he, "my broker says I ought to buy Louisvilles. Do you think he's right?"

CHAPTER III

PATRICK FOXALL AT HOME

PATRICK FOXALL, like the birds of the air, sowed not, neither did he reap; but, for all that, he had little anxiety about the morrow. A rolling stone, who gathered no moss, he would reply to the accusation that Moss was really a usurer who should not be encouraged. While no man knew where he lived, or by what means he got his money, he was welcomed in all circles where the lighter side of life is esteemed before the more serious. Sportsman, gossip, wit, no swallow migrated more surely northward, southward, at the season of the year. Heard of one month in Petersburg, the next would find him at Aix or Homburg or the more profitable "Monte." Wherever the chickens were gathered together, there was the Foxall loosed, as a wag once had said. A jovial reputation survived the slander. Pat's intimates denied with scorn the imputations of the plucked. The man was just a merry fellow. If he could play any game you chose to name better than other men could play it, well,

he had devoted an irresponsible life to the accomplishment ; and certainly he did play games better. There were those who said that Monte Carlo was worth two thousand a year to him. Others spent idle days wondering when he would make his first appearance in the Bankruptcy Court.

Patrick's appearances in London were erratic and as surprising as his disappearances. None knew what he did or what he ate, or where he spent the leisure of his mornings. The afternoons would find him at the gun-club or in the card-room ; few were the evenings when his seat in the famous restaurant was not in the fashion of a throne about which the tame birds hovered dangerously. It was here, in this glittering haven near the Strand, that Lord Alfred Troon and others of the feathered tribe discovered Patrick some hours after he had left Dudley Hatton at Oliver Chaplin's door ; and, being as anxious to hear of Patrick's friend as of himself, they hopped about him and charged his glass and filled his cigar-case and generally ministered to his necessities. In his turn, Patrick was very willing to speak of the rich men he knew. It inspired confidence, he said.

" Me bhoys, and glad I am to see you all ! Did you ask me what I was drinking, Alfred, young fellow ? Then 'twas a glass of port, to be sure !"

They greeted him boisterously, asking news of

his travels. He had been at Monte Carlo when last they heard of him.

"You were cleared out, Pat, old chap—don't you remember? You wrote to me and said you were in the devil of a mess!"

"'Tis a curse is money, and the ruin of mankind! I'll take one of your cigars, young William. They're beauties, me bhoy!"

He lit a cigar and, commanding service of the waiters with regal dignity, he went on to speak of his adventures.

"I hadn't a sixpence in the pocket—look at that now! And a week aftherwards I was driving a motor-car to the Beau-Site, and there was two thousand went with me. Faith! I tossed old Skimpel for the car and raised a pony on it at Monte! The cards were good to me and I cut me luck. 'Tis no pillar of salt I am, to be looking back at the place of me destruction! And there were friends had need of me in London. Ye'll have heard something of it from the newspapers?"

They all knew that he referred to Dudley Hatton, the Gold King, and their ears hungered for his news. Pat Foxall would make a clean breast of it presently. He had never kept a secret more than five minutes in his life. The scandalous chronicles were full of Dudley's name just now. These puny gamblers—ready, every one of them, to hunt the elusive five-

pound note—pressed close about the Irishman when Dudley was named.

"They say that Hatton's brain is failing him," exclaimed Lord Alfred, taking his cue from the question. "You know him better than any one else, Pat, and you ought to deny it. Is it true that you have seen him to-day?"

"This blessed afthernoon have I spent with him in honourable confidence. You are right to say that I know him well. There is no man enjoys the intimacy it is me privilege to speak of. We were lads together, you will remember, and he trusts me entirely. 'Pat,' says he, 'if ye had your dues, 'twould be Park Lane for you, and me in the Adelphi.' It is true, faith, though a little over-complimentary."

They said, "No, no!" and favoured the speaker with other protests of an obliging kind. A little flattery, they knew, would be rewarded by much eloquence. If there were in his possession any secrets of Dudley Hatton's life, this wild Irishman would disclose them presently.

"Then he is not ill, Pat; the stories are all lies?" some one suggested.

"Indeed, and they are. There's not a man in the city of London that could tell you the whole truth, barring meself, who's not here to speak of it. I'd have you to know that me friend, Dudley

Hatton, is a very remarkable man, and you cannot be remarkable at all in this day if the world doesn't tell lies about you. Contradict the papers, every one of them. Say that it's Pat Foxall's authority. They are prodigious liars, gentlemen, prodigious liars!"

He sipped his wine and looked exceedingly profound at the words. Lord Alfred and the pigeons nodded their heads in silent homage before so great an oracle. Ah! this admirable Pat! he would speak presently.

"They say he's suffering from heart disease!" exclaimed a little man in the corner, who until that moment had not spoken a single word. "I shouldn't be surprised to hear that. He rowed for Caius at Cambridge."

"That's just the miracle of it!" chimed in another; "if Dudley Hatton were a coarse, fat Jew, with diamond rings on his gloves and a shirt-stud like a motor-lamp, you'd believe in his cash; but an educated millionaire is twentieth century. We shall get used to him by and by; but he takes our breath away at first. They tell me he's one of the best fellows in London, a good all-round sportsman and a gentleman. You don't expect a man like that to control markets."

"They say that after the American trinity, and one or two of our big landowners, he's the richest man

in the world," added a third. "If he really has got heart disease, he's the most unfortunate beggar alive!"

Pat Foxall resented this intimate knowledge of his friend. It was an impertinence for any other man to pretend to know anything at all about Dudley Hatton. He bristled as he heard the speakers. Such impudence must be put down.

"'Tis not heart disease at all," he retorted fiercely; "ye should know better than to listen to such tattle. It is the mind that troubles him; the mind, gentlemen—a complaint that none here will be over-burdened with! We cannot have a brain like Dudley Hatton's and pay nothing for it. Look, now, here's a man that is busy in all quarters of the universal globe—concessions in America, concessions in the Argentine, his diamond mines in Africa, his tramways and railroads in London—it would drive the Rothschilds themselves to the madhouse to be afther managing them! And he's alone, mind ye; 'tis one head that does it all! Says he to me this very day, 'Tis me own house, Pat, that I built, and you are the only friend I have. There would be many,' says he, 'to dance on me grave if I go down; but I'll stand against them all, Pat; I'll make some of them dance to another tune.' Aye, 'tis a wonderful man, and ye'll understand what I fear for him."

"But you don't believe in these stories about the madhouse, Pat, do you?" Lord Alfred asked him.

"I believe what I see, young gentleman. Here's a man whose brain is awake night and day. Does he get any rest in his own house? Not an hour, I tell ye! He's married to a woman that is not afther any love for him or his affairs. Link the old and the new, and the chain that ye have is brittle and breaks. He married into a great family; and what's the end of it? The woman despises him, playing ducks and drakes with his money; and he as pitiful for kindness as any little child! Belike, if they had children of their own, Lady Hermione would be more of a woman than ever she can be now. That's the great unkindness of his life. He's no son. He's a wife that is ashamed of the name she bears. Ask yourselves what it will end in, and then say why I came to London."

He settled himself in his chair and lit a new cigar. The worshipping birds, nodding their heads sagely, came to a common agreement.

"It will be an awful smash up if he goes under," said the little man in the corner. "I shall sell my Argentines to-morrow. Call me a bear if you like."

"I'd much sooner call you a monkey!" said old Pat.

And at this the birds laughed.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW OF FATE

DUDLEY HATTON never entered his house in Park Lane but some realization of the miracle of his wealth went with him. In the City he was much as the others in the frock-coated throng. The same commonplace offices served him ; the same crowded restaurants. But at night-fall, when the great financial school broke up, and men went away to the dismal mansions of Kensington, or the artistic shams of remoter suburbs, he entered the house of his success and knew that he was the master of it. Here were no vulgar emblems of wealth. If the power of his money made itself manifest, it was such a power as a catholic taste and a true artistic sense might justify. Dudley cared nothing for rooms in this period or in that. The most costly ornaments of his house were often the least showy. He had a treasure of French furniture, unrivalled outside the Wallace collection. His gallery of French pictures should have put the

nation to shame. There were groups by Rude, by Barye, by Guillaume, in the hall and at the head of the divided staircase. The dining-room in white outraged the conventions of the advertising upholsterers, but delighted the critics. Lady Hermione's boudoir in itself represented a considerable fortune. The great drawing-room hid rather than displayed the masterpieces of the eighteenth century. Your feet sank into the softest carpets from the East ; your eye was delighted everywhere ; at first you knew not why. And all was in keeping with this well-trained judgment. The servants wore neither plush nor silk stockings. Quiet men in liveries of black seemed to harmonize with that atmosphere of repose and rest prevailing in a mansion the very solemnity of which, perhaps, provoked dulness. You feared almost to speak above a whisper in such a house.

If this home ministered to Dudley's pleasure, it cannot be said that it ministered also to his happiness. Justly proud as he was of the great position he had built for himself, he rarely failed when at home to realize the hollowness of it. This house and all its treasures would he have surrendered willingly for one hour of a child's caresses or a woman's love. Five years ago, when wealth first came to him, he had married the Earl of Lyndon's daughter, Lady Hermione, and the world had

said that he was a lucky man. But there were no children of the marriage; and surely, silently, the estrangement came. A high-bred woman, schooled in a hundred traditions of the past, she resented a disappointment and made of it displeasure. In her own home she had taken but a humble place, and from her early childhood had found some grievance of her destiny. If she now spent money lavishly, it was with the airs of one enjoying a right long denied to her, and therefore more precious. She had never understood Dudley, though at first she had wished to, and such affection as she found for him gave way in time to a fretful complaint at his dissatisfaction. She was a clever woman whom necessity alone would drive to profit by her ability. But she had always been taught that the "City" bred vulgarities, and the prejudice remained. What was her husband's just ambition was to her mere covetous persistence. "You are rich enough," was her common argument in the heat of their many quarrels; "you might do something with your money which I should be glad for you to do. My father says that you can well afford it."

"And your father is an authority!" Dudley would answer, a little cynically, remembering the earl's poverty. This antagonism to all his projects angered and repelled him. He was proud of his dominion, proud of an ability which had achieved

so much and would achieve more. His ambition, indeed, was boundless. To be the king of the gold world, to reign over it with all authority, to be able by a word to influence nations and compel governments, was the goal he set himself. Lady Hermione understood none of these things. That money was a ladder by which men gained higher things she could well believe ; but its pursuit apart from such aims she never could justify. The compliments of the social world annoyed and humbled her. Mayfair worshipped her just because she was Dudley's wife. The men who fawned upon her, flattered her, made love to her—they sought some favour of Dudley, all of them. The society papers, which raved about her, had Dudley's advertisements, every one of them. And yet she had the right to reign apart from all this sordid homage. Even her many enemies admitted that she was beautiful. Her repelling iciness added a certain grace to a stately manner and a dignified presence. There were men to whom she unbent, and these evinced for her an enduring friendship. Her husband alone knew what a passion of jealousy and pride her art of life concealed, and while another, perhaps, could have won all of that ardent nature ; he had won nothing. He knew that she did not love him.

* * * * *

Dudley drove from Harley Street to his club; and, dining there, he did not return to his house in Park Lane until ten o'clock. Lady Hermione was not at home, his valet said; but Miss Hatton was in the drawing-room. Dudley thought sometimes that the two human beings in the world who were really attached to him were his aunt Mary and Courvoisier, his valet. If the former said much in her own garrulous way, the latter was a man of few words. As a servant he had few equals. He seemed to know by instinct what would be asked of him and what he must do. At home or abroad, it did not matter to Courvoisier. New countries and foreign tongues were alike unable to baffle him. The day when he had enjoyed a holiday was hardly remembered in Park Lane; nor could any tell you of his relatives or friends. His vocabulary was one of twenty words, perhaps, but it served his master's necessities perfectly. Years ago there had been a whisper in the kitchen of Dudley's house that Courvoisier was the husband of an Italian woman whom he had deserted at Naples; but the truth of that story lacked confirmation; and, as the cook tearfully remarked, any one could see that he was a gentleman.

Dudley, asking no questions of his valet when he came home that night, took from him the smoking-jacket that he offered; and when he had looked

at himself for a moment in the mirror, he went down to the drawing-room. As ever, he found Aunt Mary there, propped up in a great arm-chair by the chimney-piece and waiting impatiently for his arrival. She had books at her side, and her spectacles lay upon the newspaper in her lap. Bred in genteel poverty, Aunt Mary was quite unable to live up to the bewildering state with which she was surrounded in Park Lane. Old habits, old economies, clung to her still. She had a rooted idea that all servants were robbers and that the cook sold the dripping. Her youth had been spent in a household whose members regarded every penny as a treasure, and the girls of which had made their own dresses, nor thought it a shame to don the homely apron. But in this great house in Park Lane, Aunt Mary was impotent. They did not even allow her to dust the ornaments. And she had always a grievance. Nothing delighted Dudley more than to hear these pet complaints.

He entered the drawing-room quietly, and avoiding the lights, asked news of his wife.

"Where is Hermione, aunt—what is she doing to-night?"

The old lady, brightening at his coming, pushed the paper aside and put on her glasses to look at him. He could not have suggested a question which gave her greater pleasure to answer.

"Ah! don't ask me that, Dudley! The servants all kept up and the gas burning! You may well want to know where she is!"

Dudley laughed at her drollery and sat down, as one unduly tired, upon the other side of the little table.

"It isn't gas, aunt, it's electric light," he said; and then, thinking still of his wife, he went on, "Hermione spoke of a bazaar; I suppose they are keeping her there."

"And a precious good thing if they kept her altogether! Every night some gaiety or pleasure! It was different when I was a girl; we had a hunt ball at Christmas, and lucky we thought ourselves to get it."

Dudley was not interested in Aunt Mary's reminiscences, so he suggested—

"But this is different; this is charity, aunt!"

"Charity! Don't talk to me! Spending good money on a lot of well dressed fools and neglecting her home! Not one bit of sewing, I do declare, has been done in this house since Christmas! And the waste—the waste, Dudley!"

Dudley smiled again and encouraged her to go on.

"You ought to approve of a religious cause, aunt."

"A religious cause—stuff and nonsense! Do

women worship their Maker with bare necks and dresses that no honest woman would have worn in my time? You're a fool to believe it, Dudley! Where is a woman's place? Why, at her husband's side! Why is this house going to rack and ruin? Because there is only your old aunt here, and no one listens to her! Ah! you may speak to me of an earl's daughter, but handsome is as handsome does! If there is one scrap of cold meat eaten downstairs, why, I'm not a truthful woman! Oh! she's hoity-toity, with her grand airs and her gowns from Paris, and her fine friends here and her fine friends there; but she's not the wife for my nephew —and that I will say, if it's the last word I speak!"

She was justly enraged and very garrulous by this time, a condition which invariably amused Dudley very much.

"Don't you think that Hermione is happy, aunt?"

"Happy—fiddlesticks! What's a woman's happiness but her home and children? Ah! my poor Dudley, you might have done better, you might have done better!"

For the first time Dudley's face hardened. She had spoken of children. He scarcely heard her when she rambled on—

"Mark my words; there will be trouble of all this, and you will both pay for it. But I shan't be

here then; I shall be dead and gone. Nobody cares for a poor old woman! Here have I been sitting in this room for an hour, and where are the glasses? A pretty state of things that some one cannot answer the bell when I ring it!"

As a matter of fact, Aunt Mary had not rung the bell at all; but Dudley now hastened to do it for her, and when, with many similar reflections and pious hopes for an early grave, she went up to bed, he sought refuge in his study and wished that he had not heard the word "children."

* * * * *

It was a hot night, moonless and stifling. Though the Season was nearly over, Park Lane continued to reflect the zenith of the brilliant months. Through the open window Dudley could hear the notes of a string band opening the great ball which one of his neighbours was giving. There were many carriages in Park Lane, and as he watched the splendidly dressed women passing to the world of pleasure, the light and life of the houses, the insignia of rich and poor he could not but contrast the state of the children of pleasure with that of the wretched creatures who lingered in the shadow of the trees, lacking, it might be, both home and bed. Here, indeed, Poverty jostled Wealth and watched it with jealous eyes. Dudley

asked himself what law of compensation governed this world of extremes. By what right was he in such a house and yon poor creature shuddering at the bitterness of the night? He had asked himself that question often, but never yet had answered it.

There were candles upon the table of his study, and he sat down before it, thinking that he would read his private letters. But now that he was alone, the will to think of little things escaped him. He had laughed at Oliver Chaplin and his gloomy prophecies when first he heard them; but here in the silence of the night they began to pursue him. It was no new thing, this premonition that he stood upon the brink of some overwhelming tragedy. For many months Dudley had known that which he would have confessed to no living man. The wonderful brain, the surpassing gift of concentration were failing him surely. He had drawn heavy cheques upon the mind's bank, and the balance shrank every day. He knew that Nature had sounded a warning bell for him — not once, but many times; and he had neglected it. Even in the doctor's study he had been unable to confess the serious truths of his condition. The mad impulses, the paroxysms of passion which were the symptoms of his nervous state had been hidden hitherto from all; but even he, it might be, did not know what the effort cost him. Sometimes

in moments of deep despair he told himself that he was going mad. In vain would Reason answer, "Rest!" Such schemes as he had laid, such vast emprises mocked the word. He did not dare to rest. Riches, fame, the honour of his financial house forbade it. Upon him alone, upon his genius the very stability of his business depended. His was the guiding brain, his the creative impulse. Let him draw back, and thousands might fall in that tremendous cataclysm. For the sake of those who had trusted him, for the confusion of the mean enemies who strove against him, Dudley must go on.

He had known many days of reckoning in the last six months, but this day was supreme. That which he had told himself another now had told him. It was easy enough before to say, "You may be mistaken; a few days here, a few days there, a trip to America, a voyage to the Cape, will put matters straight. But this could be said no more. He reflected that all might have been different had a woman's love and sympathy supported him. To-night he must tell his wife what Oliver Chaplin had said. He knew already with what cynicism she would reply; with what indifference she would hear him; nevertheless, he was determined to tell her. A great longing for rest came to him while he waited for Hermione's return. Perhaps he hoped

that a full confession might win of her that which silence had never won. The hour would show. He prayed that he might win some love or sympathy of it.

CHAPTER V

MAN AND WIFE

LADY HERMIONE returned to Park Lane at a quarter to one. A footman opened the door to her; Courvoisier, the valet, was upon the staircase when she went up. She was surprised to see the man there, but made no remark. From the first day of her marriage she had not troubled to conceal her dislike of this crafty Frenchman. He was so absolutely her husband's instrument. She knew that, in his quiet way, he resented Dudley Hatton's marriage. Perhaps his very fidelity rebelled against the subordination of his master's position. She believed that he was her enemy, yet would not stoop to any intrigue against him. Her weapon was silence; she ignored Courvoisier.

The day had been a long one, and the night found her very weary. A leader wherever she went, the success of the great charity bazaar at the Albert Hall had been almost entirely her own. They said that she worked with a spirit and a gaiety which defied rivalry. Certainly she was the most beauti-

ful woman in the room ; and, vanity compelling her to unbend and to be gracious even to the wives of business men, she appeared in a *rôle* as new as it was winning. The triumph of this democratic play followed her to the Carlton, where her friends had supped. She was the life and laughter of those tireless masqueraders. The light, the colour, the atmosphere of wealth helped that tall, commanding brunette with the pale face and the abundance of black, silky hair. Her jewels were unsurpassed in London—Dudley had always seen to that ; and to-night she wore the famous Empire rubies, while many diamond stars nested in the chiffon about her shoulders, and her arms were banded with brilliants. She went as one entitled to lead, both by her own gifts and by those she had acquired. There was no more stately figure in that immense gathering.

Dudley rarely found leisure for these functions, but was very willing that his wife should be seen at them. He was gratified to read of Hermione's success. Men complimented him upon her beauty, her victories, her womanly instincts. These qualities he believed that she possessed ; but for himself he knew nothing of them. It was so different when once the door of his house closed behind her and they were alone together. Unmercifully, defiantly, she would cast off the mask at such a time and be herself again. He believed in his heart that nothing

he could do would ever win her confidence or break this truce of the mutual mistrust. Her very desire to assume for him an affection she did not feel ended oftentimes in some new affront. He scarcely blamed her for that. She was one of those women who must act and speak as the impulse wills it. And she was a very poor actress even in her gentler moods.

* * * * *

Hermione passed up the stairs quickly, loosing her opera-cloak as she went. There was a light in Dudley's study, and she knew that he was awake. It was rare to find him up and about at such an hour, for he was a poor sleeper, and, for this reason, a man of early habits. Hermione wondered what kept him at his desk at such a time, and, curiosity being stronger than her fatigue, she determined to find out.

"Dudley, are you asleep, Dudley?"

He had fallen asleep at the table, weary of waiting and of his own fears; but she had scarcely spoken before he started up to welcome her with a murmur, as it were, of gratitude and relief.

"I was tired, Hermione—it is such a stifling night. You are very late, are you not?"

She let her opera-cloak slip from her shoulders and advanced a step towards him. The candles' light caught the flashing hues of the jewels at her breast. Her face was hard set and the lines in it

had deepened. Dudley wondered if there were a more beautiful woman in all the world, or one that could meet less kindly the man who loved her.

"Of course I am late," she said crossly. "Do you expect me to come home like a little child at ten o'clock!"

He rose from his chair and switched on a full light that they might see each other distinctly. This was the hour, inauspicious, but necessary, for the confession he had to make. He was ready to tell her exactly what Dr. Chaplin had said; to hide nothing nor to distort the truth. She must know as he knew.

"I expect you to enjoy yourself, Hermione," he said quietly. "Why should you not? If I may judge from appearances, you are doing it very well. Perhaps you won't mind giving me ten minutes now. You seem to have plenty of time for other people."

He did not mean to be retrospective; the words escaped him unwittingly. It was always the same. He longed for her sympathy, her love; but face to face with her his pride forbade him to unbend. And she, she resented hotly the bitter tone in which he so often addressed her.

"I am very tired," she said, not troubling to conceal her weariness. "Is it anything so important that I must hear it now?"

"You are always tired, Hermione."

She turned away and sat in one of the straight-backed oak chairs by the chimney-piece. He took his stand facing her, his arm resting upon the mantelshelf. He had never believed that it would be so difficult to speak to a woman whom he had loved. His heart beat quickly; he might almost have stood face to face with a judge to answer an accusation. And she was already telling herself that he had some domestic complaint to urge against her, some petty charge of neglect or pleasure.

"What do you want of me?" she asked petulantly; "you see I am listening. Has your aunt been talking about me, or is it of Hatton and Hatton? How very interesting! Please be quick, or I shall go to sleep!"

Dudley raised his eyes when she spoke of Hatton and Hatton; but this was his only protest. The insinuation wounded him; but he was determined not to quarrel with her—to-night. Besides, she had yet to hear his story, and it would be unfair to prejudge her. No woman with a heart could fail to hear him sympathetically.

"I have seen Dr. Chaplin, Hermione; I saw him this afternoon. You remember that I was going. Pat Foxall believes in him, and insisted on my taking his opinion. I did not wish to go; but perhaps it was for the best."

She lay back in the chair and opened her fan. If she was interested, she disguised it successfully. Perhaps her pride forbade submission. Dudley did not tell her as one who cared for her attention.

"I suppose Mr. Foxall and your doctor are friends," she said languidly; "they share the fees and laugh at you afterwards. Really, Dudley, you ought to avoid that vulgar man, for my sake! Of course, he is something in the City, too! They are always 'something in the City' when they drink too much and borrow your money!"

She turned her head away and made a pretence of staring at the cartoons on the wall above her. Dudley, on his part, was determined that she should not anger him, and he persisted in spite of her waywardness.

"Foxall never borrows my money and he doesn't drink," was his quiet answer; "the habits you speak of are, surely, aristocratic. At least, that is my experience, though I do not profess to be an authority. Let us talk of something else, Hermione; at least, let me tell you what the doctor said—if you are interested."

Her gesture was one of wearying patience; nor did her words belie it.

"Of course I am interested—and tired, Dudley. You must see that I am tired," she pleaded.

He sighed and moved away from her. For the moment he was half determined to pass it all by, to forget it, never to speak to her on such a subject again; but, antagonistic to the resolution, that other voice said, "You must speak; you must tell her all, lest it be true!"

"I am sorry you are tired, Hermione," he said hesitatingly; "but I think, all the same, that you ought to know what the doctor says."

"You are ill, then, Dudley?" she asked, looking up at him in surprise.

"Heaven knows how ill!"

She sat forward in the chair and began to show a new interest. Fate played with them momentously in that hour. A chance word, a quaver of the voice, could win all or lose all of their forgotten love. But it was written otherwise, and neither man nor woman might defy a decree foreordained and inevitable. Hermione herself was half afraid, but unwilling to show her fear.

"If you are ill," she said in a low voice, "if you are ill, why do you not leave your work?"

"That is exactly what I am ordered to do; to leave it, to give up everything—my success, my work, my lead, to let them all go—or to die in a madhouse in six months' time!"

He had not meant to put it so brutally, but the words escaped him, overstrung and heart-broken

as he was. Perhaps a curiosity to know if anything would awaken this cold nature to one spark of affection or regard for him drove him on to complete confession. If he must suffer, why should she, who had shared the victory, escape? Was it possible that she desired his death? He regarded her closely when he had made an end of it. Her white face was flushed; her eyes were very bright. He thought that she looked afraid.

"You are trying to frighten me!" she exclaimed at last. "I don't believe anything of the kind was said! If the business is injuring your health, why don't you give it up? You know how glad I should be."

"Are you ashamed of it, then, Hermione?"

"Ashamed of it! Oh, no—proud, so proud!"

She laughed hardly, the cynical laugh of a woman's contempt. The ingratitude of it all stung Dudley to the quick, as it had stung him many times since she had been his wife. All the love for her he had once known could turn to a strong man's hate at such an answer. The dearest things to him were her scorn.

"We should have been very poor but for my business, Hermione," he said, still quietly.

"Poor! Is it possible to speak of nothing but money? Does nothing else count? Am I to live my life for money? Oh! I hear of it every-

where. My husband is so rich, you know, so famous among those friends of his I cannot receive in my own house! And I am to think of nothing else. It must be money, money, money always. I wonder sometimes why you do not bring home your books, that we may read them together. I could add up the figures for you, Dudley; you are so rich, it would not matter if I made mistakes! What sociable evenings we might spend in this room!"

Dudley breathed quickly.

"If the books I brought home were cheque-books," he said with some temper, "I am sure you would be interested."

It ended ever thus, the little misunderstanding, the mutual reproach, the final argument of money. Conscious as she was of that which her relations owed to Dudley's generous help, Hermione's passionate nature mastered her when "money" was mentioned, and all her uncontrollable temper now answered the taunt.

"Oh! I know—I know!" she cried, as she sprang to her feet and stood before him with blazing eyes. "Speak of my wages! Tell me what I am paid to be the head of this house—how much I earn here! You have told me often before. Tell me once again to-night."

He interrupted her with an angry cry. They

stood face to face now, and words had no meaning. All that Dudley had meant to say, the love he would have craved, the sympathy he sought, were forgotten at the insult she put upon him.

"To stay here! Is that your gratitude? Do I care whether you stay or go? I am sick of your temper, sick of your complaints! Tell whom you please. Go if you will. I have done with you!"

He took a step towards her and pointed to the door.

Both had lost all right sense of reason. Hermione's hands were clenched, her face flushed crimson. Passion broke the fan in her fingers, and its fragments fell one by one to the floor. Never before had Dudley so answered her, never threatened her like this. Afraid, trembling, she drew back from him in fear, for she believed that he would strike her. And he, beside himself, unconscious of what he did, half flung her from him, and then, as he reeled, all things went dark before his eyes and he knew that he was alone.

CHAPTER VI

THE CALL OF THE DAY

TWO hours passed before Dudley lifted his head to see that dawn was breaking and the night no more. For him they had been hours of mental darkness and oblivion. Yesterday and all its exciting events were for the moment obliterated utterly from his mind. The long months of tireless effort, of strain and stress and the penalties of his wealth ended finally in this instantaneous loss of faculties, this brain benumbed and helpless. Just as a man goes headlong into battle, is seen on all the heights, the object of envy, the belauded of those who lag, so had he wrestled with the enemies in his path, conquered and overcome. And now Fate had struck him down; he fell as leaders will, in one supreme collapse, and became of no more account than the meanest victim of a common affray.

All sense of time and place was lost in this fatal hour. He remembered nothing; could not recollect where he had been yesterday; forgot Oliver

Chaplin and his evil prophecies; knew nothing of Hermione's return or of the scene which had passed between them. Perhaps the supreme irony of it all was this—that just as the mental chain had snapped suddenly, so, with like suddenness, there came to him the will to rest. He felt that he could sleep now. The thousand details of his harrassing affairs no longer demanded their quotum of his energies. He did not wake from the mind's trance to say, "I must do this or that; play such a card or finesse another; reckon with this enemy or warn that friend." A delicious sense of ease and mental repose soothed him. He knew only that he was very tired and had the wish to sleep.

The night had been hot and stifling, but the day broke as a day of the summer's zenith. Out of the shadows the great trees in the Park shaped quickly. Dudley went to his window and, throwing it wide open, he breathed a full breath of that life-giving air. How fresh it was, even here at London's heart! how fresh and suggestive of that remoter country life which should be his reward some day! He could see the patrons of the *Belle Etoile* stirring already from bench or bank, as the daylight waked them and the sunshine flashed in their heavy eyes. They spoke of London, as did the great railway vans, and the market carts, and the sleepy drivers welcoming the day. Elsewhere the scene was wonder-

fully sylvan, giving you delightful glades and a great expanse of meadow grass and feathery boughs, through which the sun's rays came dancingly; and such an hour of silence and the beauty of the dawn, that London was forgotten and all her sleeping millions. Dudley stood long at his window, regarding this scene and remembering how little his world could realize the untainted freshness of a summer's morn. Park Lane itself was like a white thread bordering upon a mighty lawn. There was no living thing to break the stillness when the market carts had passed by. He heard church bells striking the hour of three, and they had the musical softness of the bells he knew in Venice. The birds alone chirruped incessantly, the active heralds of the dawn.

Dudley closed his window and turned, a little chilled, to the room and the sleeping house. There were many electric lamps still alight in his study, and he switched them off one by one, mechanically and without thought. The letters of last night lay upon his table, but did not recall him to any interest. He knew that something had happened, that some chain of thought had snapped, but could not link it up again. Very quietly and methodically he went on to gather up the papers and to arrange them upon his table. Once he thought that he heard some one moving on the landing

outside his door; but the footsteps, if footsteps they were, passed on, and he paid no heed to them. That new desire to rest and sleep was still with him; nevertheless, he found himself without the will to give effect to it. Although he knew it not, his brain was still idly seeking the thread it had lost.

What had he done last night, that the dawn found him mindless and inert? The answer defied him for a long time, but it came at last, clear and awakening as the first call of the day. He had seen Oliver Chaplin; he had heard a sentence which no man could hear without terror. In six months! He pressed both hands to his temples and stood still to wrestle with his fate. In six months!

"My God!" he said, "in six months I may be in a madhouse!"

And so the end of that false truce had come. The awakened brain, taking up its one idea, refused audience to all others. He was still unconscious of all that had passed between his wife and himself; he did not remember her angry scorn, his own passion, or the bitterness of her reproaches. The warning which had been uttered predominated above all else. He who had won so much from fortune must win no more; the genius which had established so many victories must be chained and

fettered; the inspiring ambition of his life must be trampled on and broken. Could he but have deceived himself with the story that this was professional cant, the foolish jargon of a paid pessimist, he might have put it aside more easily; but he was clever enough to know how true it was. For years now he had driven that human machine at its fiercest speed; night and day he had schemed and planned for the battle of to-morrow. That which he had told the doctor was no hallucination. Nature herself warned him as no physician could do.

All this was in his mind when he quitted his study and said that he would sleep, and sleeping, forget. It was half-past three now, and the sunlight began already to banish the shadows on the staircase of the house. He could hear a clock ticking loudly, and as he crossed the landing he thought that some one moved in one of the rooms above; but when he stood to listen, he heard nothing but the distant rumble of some passing wagon; and, very cold in body and downcast in mind, he went up to his room. Not until he had mounted the stairs, and was about to enter his own room did he become aware that the door of Hermione's bedroom was open and that the lamps were still alight there. This unusual occurrence brought him to a stand, just as lights in his own room had arrested his wife's attention two hours

ago. What had passed between them last night? What had he said or done? He remembered now as in a flash. They had quarrelled, finally, irrevocably. He had charged her with her ingratitude and told her to leave the house. And was that all? Dudley could not remember; he feared to remember. A voice whispered that he had struck her. He trembled at the shame of such a charge; all his manhood revolted at it. He knew that it was false, and yet the voice whispered, "You forget—you had lost your reason."

Many minutes passed and found him still standing before that open door. While at one moment he had the idea that Hermione had already left the house for ever, at another, dread of that which he might have done drove him to the point of frenzy, so that he did not dare to enter the room or seek the truth. He could remember now the mutual reproaches, the angry recriminations which had passed between them in the short scene which ended so abruptly. And she had left him as he had bidden her. She would return to her father, he thought, and the world would learn the story of their unhappiness. It would be a jest for every scribbler, a shame which he must carry henceforth, as one branded with a woman's disfavour. Or, perchance, she yet lingered and would hear him if he went to her. Was it beyond hope

to believe that out of this supreme misunderstanding some good might come? He knew that he could stoop to any self-humiliation if thereby he might win of her one word of regard or womanly affection. And this thought guided him at last. He did not believe that she had left the house. He opened the door of her bedroom and entered.

* * * * *

An opera-cloak half covered the face of the dead. Hermione, dressed as she had been when she returned from the hotel, had fallen at the foot of her bed; and, seeming to cling with one hand to the brass rail above her, the other was pressed convulsively to her throat.

And the man knew that the end of it all was here, of her life and of his; and, turning from the room, he cried loudly for help.

CHAPTER VII

THE PATHOS OF THE DOUBT

THE house awoke, and whispered voices on the landing above passed the fateful news and called others to hear it. Courvoisier, the valet, half dressed when he came down, was the first to hear his master's cry and the first to answer it. Other servants came from other rooms and stood at the stair's head timidly. Courvoisier alone had all his wits about him.

"What has happened, sir? What is it?" he asked quietly, as Dudley staggered towards him and tried to tell the story. He had never seen his master like this. Trembling like a frightened child, Dudley leaned against the balustrade of the staircase and put both hands upon it for support.

"My wife is ill—dying!" he gasped. "Call Dr. Hadarley, her own doctor. Why don't you go? I tell you she is dying!"

The valet went at once, without word or sign of emotion. Servants began to hurry to and fro—

some to the kitchens, some to the street-door. Dudley himself, seeking courage in a supreme effort, returned to Hermione's side and knelt there. He knew not, he would not ask what the true story of the night might be. Figures moved about him, he was unconscious of their presence; lights danced before his eyes, he shut them out with burning fingers. From the first the great dread haunted him. What had he done? Why did his wife lie dead? He could have cried aloud with the agony of doubt, but his tongue failed him; and distractedly, blindly, he rose and began to pace the room, praying God that his wife still lived.

There is no suffering more acute, no impatience which borders so near upon an agony as that which attends these moments of delay, when those dear to us lie waiting the last aid which medical skill can give them. The child stricken suddenly—will it live, will it die ere help can come? The man we have loved, the woman without whom life has no story—is there hope for him or her, or must the truth be this? Dudley suffered as he had never suffered in all his life while he waited for Dr. Hadarley's coming. Afraid at one moment to look upon his dead wife's face, at another his arms were closed about the inanimate figure; and he clung to it, woefully, passionately in the madness of his grief.

Hermione was not dead—it could not be! The night lied to him; but day would bring the truth. What mattered it now that they had drifted apart, that wild words had been spoken or wild threats uttered? Let them be forgotten, blotted out, before this grief supreme. Ah! if she lived, how he would atone! He would win her love by the very strength of his own and of a life's devotion. Of what account, indeed, were riches and ambition if they must end in this? Henceforth his life should be lived for her. He vowed it a hundred times while he listened with strained ear for the doctor's bell and prayed that Hermione lived. All might yet be redeemed, he said, all made new. There was a life's drama in the pathos of that doubt.

* * * * *

Rupert Hadarley reached the house a quarter of an hour after Courvoisier had left it. He came in a hansom cab and carried a bag of instruments in his hand, for they had told him there had been an accident. He was a young, ambitious man, and it may be that he saw some prospect of advancement in such a distinguished case. From the first his manner was entirely professional, and to Dudley's almost incoherent questions he answered distantly, "I cannot tell you yet." In truth, he knew at a

glance that the patient was dead. It remained only to ascertain the cause of her death; and with this desire he began to interrogate those who stood about him.

"Was there any one with Lady Hermione when she died?"

The maid, a Frenchwoman, who had run down at the first outcry and troubled all the house with her hysterical lamentation, answered sobbingly—

"Madame was quite alone."

The doctor bent over the prone figure and turned back the eyelids. He was aware that it was but a pretence, but went on with it doggedly. All the common tests answered "Death." There was no pulse, breathing had ceased; the face wore already the calm aspect of one who had ceased to live.

"Your mistress was at the Albert Hall last night, I believe?" he suggested while he worked. "You can see that she did not undress, and she is still wearing her jewels. You were not here when she came home?"

"M'lady told me not to wait up. She was very kind and good. Ah! *mon Dieu!* that I shall speak of it!"

She turned away, weeping bitterly. The doctor ordered the others to leave the room. He knew that they could not help him. He wished to be alone with Dudley that he might tell him all.

"Tell me, please, just what happened," he asked. "I must know everything."

Dudley, who had watched his every movement, his eyes, his hands, the play of his face, as one watches a messenger of life or death, did not dare to ask the supreme question, "Does she live?" He tried to speak in a natural way, but his tongue was parched as with a fever and he conversed excitedly, incapable for the moment of realizing those emotions which he had just suffered.

"My wife returned from the Carlton Hotel at one o'clock," he said. "I was in the study and she came up to me. You know that I have been unwell and much worried, and I think that I was unreasonable. We quarrelled and she went to bed. She was excited and not herself. The next that I saw of her was in this room; she was lying by the bed like one in a faint. I picked her up and sent for you. If it is the heart, she will be better presently. I am sure you will admit that, doctor? You can tell me that she will be better?"

Rupert Hadarley made up his mind in an instant. Nothing was to be gained by evasion now. Sooner or later, what mattered it? His best was done and he must speak.

"She will never be better," he said quietly; "she is dead, Mr. Hatton."

Dudley did not move. No figure of stone could

have been more immobile. The deathly pallor of his face was hardly to be seen in the dim light.

None but a close observer would have seen that his hands were twitching, his lips moving convulsively.

"She is dead!" he repeated, word by word.

The doctor, fearing that he would succumb to the shock, drew near and put a hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Hatton!" he said very kindly, "yes, she is dead."

Still Dudley did not move. He heard every word that was spoken, perceived the figures clearly, both that of his dead wife and of the man who stood at his side. But the scene was unreal to him. He played no part in it. It was just as though he had become the indifferent spectator of a tragedy.

"She is dead!" he repeated; "but why—why, doctor?"

"She has died of heart disease," was the answer; "at least, I feel sure it is that. The inquest will tell us more."

He pronounced the judgment as though inquiry were taken for granted. Dudley, scarcely understanding him, turned sharply at the word.

"Inquest! You would not have an inquest in my house?"

The younger man had anticipated some such outburst as this. From the first he had said, "It will

be difficult to give a certificate, and there will be trouble." But Dudley's cry of surprise astounded even him.

"The merest formality," he said reassuringly; "five minutes will dispose of it. I am quite convinced that it is a heart complaint. But there is a mark on the throat which is a little perplexing. I wonder if your wife bruised herself as she fell?"

Dudley pushed him aside and strode towards the bed. The bruise of which he had spoken was plainly to be seen beneath the circlet of diamonds wound about the throat. The flesh there was blue and discoloured; it might have been hurt by a man's fingers. Dudley had never lived through such a moment in his life. All the supreme doubt, that doubt which to name was in itself terrible, returned to him, magnified a thousandfold. What had happened, then? what had been done last night? Was this brutality the charge against him? Might it even be that Hermione had died as imagination, in a mood most awful, would suggest? His brain reeled when he thought of it; the room swam before his eyes.

"She must have fallen," he stammered wildly; "she struck her shoulder when she fell. She was excited, doctor—and we quarrelled. It must be that!"

He seemed to grope his way blindly from the

bed, but the doctor caught the outstretched hand and led him from the room. He understood the case already. In the study below they took up the thread of it as men who have left some scene of death behind them and may speak with new calmness. Dudley did not cease to ask himself why there must be an inquest.

"Tell me, doctor," he said with some composure, "are you convinced that my wife died of heart disease?"

The doctor had no defence ready. Professional tradition hampered him. He liked Dudley Hatton and would gladly have served him. But he must yet pay some respect to regularity.

"It is my strong conviction," he said slowly; "but, of course, one cannot be sure."

"Would you gain anything, then, by distressing me in the way you speak of?"

"Oh! you must not look at it like that! I have attended Lady Hermione, and perhaps, if I were less methodical, I could do what you wish; but, you see, it would not be quite right."

Dudley heard him impatiently. This young man, he felt, hesitated already, and by hesitation would be lost. He feared to tempt him, but the shock had left him pitiless and at his wits' end.

"Come," he said, "is it so very necessary to be regular?"

Rupert Hadarley could not answer. He was much as other men—anxious for his own advancement and the rewards of his profession. Why, after all, should he make trouble? Dudley Hatton, he remembered, could establish his fortunes in that city of the rich they call Mayfair. Why should he make an enemy of a man who might be his benefactor? To do him justice, he had no grave doubt as to the manner of her ladyship's death; indeed, he thought that he could tell the whole story, the quarrel, it might even be actual violence, and upon that a weak woman's death from shock. The graver suggestion was preposterous.

"It is necessary to be regular when one is uncertain," he said at last. "Of course, I see that this would be a great annoyance to you. I have attended Lady Hermione for heart attacks, and I think that I might, without——"

He hesitated for the word, and in that moment of hesitation Dudley spoke the final word.

"You are acting as my friend," he said with some emotion; "nothing that I can do would reward you for all your care of my dead wife. I shall endeavour, at least, to show my gratitude, doctor."

* * * * *

Early upon the following morning the valet, Courvoisier, carried to Rupert Hadarley's house a letter containing a cheque for the services the

doctor had rendered Lady Hermione Hatton. The young man regarded the document with astonished eyes and promised at once to do as the letter requested.

"Tell Mr. Hatton I will see that the proper authorities have the certificate to-day," he said with some eagerness. "I shall be round to see your master almost immediately."

Courvoisier answered, "Yes, sir," and left the house at once. In the street, where none could see him, he stopped as though in some perplexity.

"Then there was trouble—and he's bought that fellow over," he muttered to himself at last; and going on, he added, "the fool—the fool! He should have paid in gold."

CHAPTER VIII

PATRICK FOXALL EXPOUNDS

IN a little restaurant off Oxford Street at six o'clock uopn a January day, six months after London had heard of Lady Hermione's death, Patrick Foxall expounded to a learned circle those mysteries of horse-racing which are not for every common man. A close observer, perhaps, might have complained that the gallant Irishman's plumage, usually so brilliant, betrayed those migratory habits of which we have treated in another chapter. Certainly, some of Patrick's old smartness had deserted him; and while his flaming scarlet waistcoat was no less remarkable than before, and his light frock-coat did not lack the fashionable cut, nevertheless brass buttons missing from the one, and the frayed lapels of the other, gave small support to those stories of good luck with which he delighted his diminishing satellites. Times, indeed, had changed for Patrick Foxall. No longer did a throne in the

splendid restaurant by the Strand harbour him or stand for the place of homage. He spoke, as ever, of his great friends, of the confidence my Lord This, or the Earl of That, reposed in him, of the familiar days he had enjoyed in princely houses; but discovery stalked close behind him, and the avidity with which he snapped up the stray cigar, or the pains he was at to borrow even the humble half-crown, were in themselves eloquent of his true condition. This, be it known, was not the fault of the system, by which Patrick should have made his fortune at the gaming-tables. The bank at Monte Carlo would certainly have been broken had he found capital to back him. But friends were reticent and strangers unbelieving. Pat came to the conclusion that it was a dismal world.

"Faith! me and Jack Farrer, that was a Little Go Flyer at Cambridge, worked it out together, and not a figure could ye find fault with! I was off to Monte the next day, and the whole town heard of me winnings. The gold that I have fingered, gentlemen! There wasn't a portmanteau could keep the lids of it shut to be bought in the town! Twenty-four times did I stake the maximum and win it, as the papers told ye. 'Twas a sensation, not to be forgotten!"

He looked about him for applause, and the

"pigeons," delighting in his bombast, helped it willingly on its way.

"A nine days' wonder, Pat!" was Lord Alfred's gentle insinuation. Patrick heard him with mingled feelings of scorn and regret.

"'Tis the curse of the country, is this same gambling spirit!" he continued sagely. "If the Parliament was wise, they'd pass a Bill and put it down. I'll ask you what you'd have done with red called forty-two times, and forty-one on the paper? Where's a prudent man in the face of it? Nowhere, me bhoys, just nowhere! There's Jack, that was the reserve for the Tripos, and me that is a wonder at the x + y's; and will ye believe that the pair of us was wrong? Faith! 'tis nonsense entirely! There's a system here in this pocket that would make the fortune of the Rothschilds themselves if I had the mind to part with it. But I'm one of the old sort. I stand shoulder to shoulder with me friends, and they shall share with me at a pony a man! 'Tis the want of capital, bedad! that ruins every honest industry."

He crossed his legs and looked profoundly wise; but his hearers shook their heads, for they had heard of Patrick's system before.

"They broke you up, Pat, didn't they? Sent you home carriage paid?" one of them asked.

"Faith! I came home third class—me, that

has travelled with princes! There was a young man at Cannes that had a fancy to play piquet, and no second father could have treated him more kindly. He payed the fare to Paris; and Maurice, the costumier, the Lord be good to him! was the gentleman altogether. 'You'll mention me name in the papers you honour with your contributions,' says he. 'And, bedad!' says I, ''tis columns I'll fill!' So are the mighty fallen, gentlemen; so is Patrick Foxall become a footstool to his enemies."

He permitted a tear to drop into his whisky, and, observing a certain coldness on the part of those who feared that he was about to borrow money of them, he persisted with his reminiscences.

"But he will rise again," he said, after a contemplative pause; "like the phœnix, the ancient Patrick will emerge from the ashes! He will be glorious in resurrection, gentlemen. His philosophy is the poet Tennyson's. He would have been a poet himself had he the mind."

He stared about him fiercely, and then, like a child repeating a verse, he began to recite:—

> "I hold it truth with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones:
> That men may rise by timely loans—
> From I O U's to right good things."

He wound up with an expressive "Bow-wow!"

and the verse, being an inspiration, brought to his recollection something he had quite forgotten.

"Which reminds me," said he, before the applause had died away, "I have a tip for the Spring Handicap I would not utter aloud in this room—not for a bag of gold! You will not be wanting to hear it, gentlemen. 'Tis the curse of the country, this same gambling, and you'll take a warning by old Patrick!"

He spoke very playfully, knowing his audience. The "pigeons," in their turn, no sooner heard the word "tip" than they were all ears. Patrick, every one said, had been born under a lucky star. He was shabby and down-at-heel to-day, but to-morrow would find him in a blaze of splendour; and his tips were "real good things." So his hearers became all generosity. One filled his glass, another whispered that "If a sovereign," etc. He received their worship kindly and unbent to them.

"I am off to Cambridge to-morrow," said he, "and I'll send ye a wire when I get to Newmarket if it's all right. Barton, the trainer, goes to the last shirt-button on the chance. I know me friend, Lord William, is in it, for his confidential letter tells me as much. You shall all share, me bhoys, and old Pat no luckier than the rest of them! He needs it, bedad! The star of his firmament is temporarily

obscured, and clouds enshroud him. He needs all the luck he will be getting just now ! "

It is to be observed that the excellent Patrick was careful not to name the horse which should work these wonders ; fearing that his hearers might press the point, he changed the subject cleverly.

" Tell me now," he asked, as though remembering it suddenly, " have any of ye seen or heard of me friend, Dudley Hatton ? 'Tis a question I meant to ask ye long ago. I hear strange stories, gentlemen, and I'd know if they are true or false. What's become of Dudley, what's keeping him out of London ? Some of you will inform us, though 'tis not Pat Foxall, faith ! Here am I, that was own brother to him and better, wanting word from him these twenty weeks or more. 'Tis a mystery entirely— and his fortune going to the devil, I hear ! "

Lord Alfred Troon, who made it a business to remember all the unpleasant things said about his friends, could be loquacious enough when scandal was the topic.

" Hatton's in Scotland, I believe," he said with some vanity ; " no one quite knows, but I think that's the place. He went away the day after the funeral, and there is not a man in London has seen him since. Of course, people talk. If it is true that he was on the verge of bankruptcy, you could understand it all. I am not speaking of my own know-

ledge ; but there is every reason to believe that Lady Hermione died under very curious circumstances. They say she was hunted by the Jews ; and when he could not pay, the crash came. Of course, it may not be true ; but if it is, I should like to know why Dudley Hatton disappeared."

This profound disclosure moved the company greatly. While the speaker dropped the ashes from his cigarette with the air of a man who is thinking very deeply and is gravely affected by his own story, others, who knew nothing whatever of it, gave their version and added ornament to the original. Old Pat alone was silent.

" If Hatton and Hatton are going smash, they're a long time about it," said one youth, a little wiser than the others. " All sorts of rumours are afloat in the City ; but nothing comes of them. Of course, Jan Beckstein and the South African gang are delighted. Dudley Hatton would have wiped the floor with them if he had remained in London ; but when he shut up shop, they got their innings."

" They are saying in the clubs that Hatton's lost his reason," said another, whose worldy goods amounted, perhaps, to fifteen shillings and a cigarette-holder. " I wonder if it is true ? He certainly went up like a rocket and came down like the stick. I suppose he felt his wife's death very much—at least, that's the only explanation."

Old Pat heard the slander with a contempt he was at no pains to conceal. Like all his race, he was a staunch friend, an unrelenting enemy.

"Some of you knew Dudley, I think?" he asked, when the tongues had ceased to wag and the company settled down to a pious memory of the departed; "he did a turn to one or two of you, I think?"

They shuffled at the recollection and the truth of it.

"As an acquaintance," said Lord Alfred, "he was a very pleasant man."

Patrick began to drum with his fingers upon the marble table. He was very angry, and his temper would out.

"Aye," he said ironically, "'twas not backward ye were at the champagne when his house was open! Since you've all had your say, I'll put in my word! Let me be kind to you, gentlemen, and tell you, as I told you once before, that you are very pretty liars, every one of you!"

He blew out the match which he struck to light a new cigar; and while they uttered exclamations of protest and tried to make a jest of it, he drew his chair nearer to the table and beat it with his fists until the glasses shook.

"No," he went on proudly, "Dudley Hatton's

not in Scotland, and he's a thousand miles from the bankruptcy court! Aye! if there was one of you that had the money to buy his postage stamps, he'd be a rich man! Tell your friends, the Rothschilds, that I, Patrick Foxall, say it. Tell them that I am here to help a man that's been a brother to me. Say that Dudley Hatton's coming back to London; 'twill be true, I swear it. He comes with me. We'll give you the lie together, me bhoys!"

He turned a defiant gaze upon them, and, surprised at the onslaught, they began to excuse themselves. If this earnestness of friendship was a rare mood with him, it was none the less estimable. The "pigeons," said that Pat certainly knew something of the mystery attending Dudley Hatton's disappearance, and that, even at the price of this fiery invective, they must hear it. They would tell it to-night to astonished diners.

"What do you know, Pat?" Lord Alfred asked him; "you must know a good deal, or you would not be so angry. Tell us all about it. You owe it to Dudley."

Patrick, in sooth, knew nothing at all, except at second hand; but the old pride of acquaintanceship followed him even in adversity; and, unwilling to confess his ignorance, but very desirous of applause, he evaded the direct issue cleverly.

"A pretty piece of mendacity you'd make of it

if I opened me lips," he snapped, unloosing his collar and wiping his face with a monstrous blue handkerchief. "'Tis the way of the world all the time. Let a man turn his back for a moment upon those that knew him, and there will be chalk marks all over it before he shows his face again. Nice friends ye are to Dudley Hatton, faith! I'll tell him so when I see him Thursday!"

"You are going to see him Thursday, Pat?"

"Indeed and I am."

"But you say that he's not in Scotland?"

"'Tis a true word."

"Perhaps he's at Newmarket," said a youth with a tallow-candle face and a tremendous stock.

"He's not in Newmarket, and he's not in Scotland!" was the dignified retort. "He's just in the West of England, and 'tis a hermit's life he's living. I had it by intimate letter this very day. Believe it or not, as ye please; but Dudley Hatton is just a wild man of the woods. He's living in a hut, and there's no man has spoken to him since he left this same London. Me letter tells me that a figure of marble could not close the lips tighter or be less to the world. But we shall change all that, gentlemen; we shall give Jan Beckstein and his gang a bit of news they'll not be wanting at all! 'Tis me, Patrick, that says it—me, that is Dudley's friend!"

He buttoned his coat with the air of a man who had solved a nation's difficulty. The plain truth was that Patrick had been ignorant as the rest of Dudley's whereabouts until that very morning, when chance had brought him face to face, in Regent Street, with Lady Hermione's maid, and he had stood to gossip with her. How, or by what means, she possessed the secret of Hatton's disappearance, Pat could not then discover ; but a few of his magnificent compliments, the promise of theatre tickets, and a delicate reference to her enhanced beauty, had accomplished much. The girl said that her master was in Cornwall. Pat determined that very instant that he would go to Cornwall, too.

" Mark me words," he said proudly, standing before them as a judge omnipotent, " Dudley Hatton will come back, and those that have forgotten him will be taught to remember. I say no more. 'Tis a fool's Paradise his enemies are living, and they'll need wings to crawl out of it presently. Tell your great friends that ; say that Patrick Foxall has spoken ! "

He strode from the room defiantly. The " pigeons," remembering how many of their cigars he had smoked, how many glasses he had emptied, hurried after him vainly. The tip for the Spring Handicap ! Pat had forgotten all about that !

And is it possible that there was no trainer at

Newmarket, no secret or valuable intelligence, no tip, after all? Had Patrick invented it? His enemies might say so with justice.

BOOK II

THE DREAM

CHAPTER IX

THE EXILE

THE rugged Cornish cliff was steep and forbidding, but Beryl Garth climbed its winding path with a child's nimble feet ; and so soon as she was at the summit she espied her friend awaiting for her and ran up to him breathlessly. It was already late of a February afternoon, and the aureole of the West spread, with diminishing splendour of its golden arc, the last glory of the day. No human thing could be seen upon the lonely moor which shelved away from the desolate headlands. There was no token of life about the upstanding castle wherein Beryl lived. Fishing boats drifted lazily on the windless sea, but did not speak of fishers or their toil. No sounds were in the air, none but that rolling music of the beach which neither storm nor

calm might hush. The splendour of the western flame touched all things in its mellow path. The day went out with the tide to the rhythm of the wordless song.

Beryl found Dudley Hatton just where she had expected him to be, sitting upon a rude stone bench whence you could look across the moor to her own house and eastward to the distant villages beyond Black Head. He wore, as he often did, a riding-coat of black, and breeches to match, and one of those soft felt hats which the war bequeathed to a comfort-loving nation. Beryl did not know what Dudley might be ; but she thought sometimes that he was an officer from Plymouth who had come to St. Vestall's for a holiday ; and an officer stood, at present, for her only fashion of hero.

The child crossed the grassy slope at a gallop, and, regarding her new acquaintance a little apprehensively, she remembered that she was very late. When she had recovered her breath, she told him what had kept her.

" I'm sure I'm late," she said in her grown-up way, which delighted him by its artlessness ; " that's the worst of being late, you are always sure of it. When I was running down the hill, I said, ' He'll think I've forgotten, and go away.' But you didn't think it, and you didn't go away ; and I'm glad."

Beryl was fifteen ; but she had lived all her life on this wild Cornish coast, and got her education as she could, and was the oddest mixture of the matron and the child that a man might find between London and St. Ives. While at one moment she would speak of household cares as though the fortunes of her home depended upon that little wise head, at another she would be looking for Wyemarke and the fairies in the placid, weedy pools of the sleeping bay. Her simplicity was no less engaging than her girlish curiosity. She had found Dudley out when he had been but a week in this newly discovered solitude ; and he, who had wished to shut himself away from men, became, he knew not how, the guardian of her pretty confidence.

" What shall we talk about, Beryl ? " he asked, while he watched her bright eyes and the flush of excitement which gave new colour to her healthy cheeks—he would not tell her how much the child's voice meant to him in those hours of the reckoning.

" My father is ill," she said, the words running away with her as they always did ; " not very ill, you know, but angry with the clergyman. He rode away to Bodmin and says he won't be back until Thursday. I know it isn't true, because Dave Evans was at the house just now, and when Dave Evans comes, father always gets better. They'll

be up all night and wake me—they do that often. I can just see the boats under my window, and I wonder, wonder, wonder why? But you'd never like Dave Evans," she went on at a breath; "his hands are big and red as—as crabs. And when he says, 'You'm look well the morning, miss!' I could box his ears for making such a noise. And he doesn't like you, Mr. Hatton; he says 'You'm mysterious.' I wonder if you are? As if one cannot live where one likes, without asking other people!"

Dudley was interested in this unflattering description of Dave Evans. He anticipated that such a life as he led among the sparse people of this fishing village would give employment to its busy-bodies. Courteous and kindly to all, no hermit dwelt more absolutely alone. The cottage which harboured him was the humblest of its kind. The faithful Courvoisier, installed in an inn at St. Vestall's, was not to be bribed with the ale and the cider of a gossip-loving village. Not a word could be drawn from him. The fishers were left to their own inventions, and while some said that Dudley was a lawyer from London wanting to buy the land, others shook their heads and were profoundly mysterious. Ah! what they could say, "if they had the mind to!" but not having the mind to, they maintained a discreet silence. For the matter of that, St. Vestall's had no need of a mystery. The castle on the headland

wherein Beryl's father lived, was food enough for any curious appetite. Gossips asked questions about it every day. The questions were never answered.

"I am sorry that I give so little satisfaction to Mr. Evans," Dudley said, when Beryl had finished her story; "perhaps he has got a house to let, and would like me to take it. I must see the old man for myself. These poor people have nothing else to do but to talk about some one, I suppose. Well, it doesn't hurt me, and it doesn't hurt you, Beryl, so let them talk as they please."

Beryl hastened to correct him.

"Oh, they've a lot to do," she said; "they work so hard. Sometimes it's in the daytime, sometimes it isn't. I hear them all night under my window; and they walk about just like shadows. Then the boats go away and it is all quiet, and if I'm frightened, I don't tell any one. Of course, it is silly, but you cannot help it. If your father is in trouble——"

"You never told me about that, Beryl."

"I can't tell you everything—and—and—you wouldn't care. Father's bothered about a lot of things, but he never says anything to me, except when breakfast isn't ready. I know he's in trouble, just because he doesn't tell me—and it is lonely up there, and—and—I wish you were my father, Mr. Hatton!"

She said it with a child's earnestness, and in it might be read the whole story of one whose life had lacked both love and light. The pathetic look which passed into the man's eyes when she spoke, the sudden distraction of his manner were lost to her in the sense of her own loneliness and isolation. There had been no event in her life so memorable as this coming of a stranger to Black Head. Her chance encounter with him on the lonely moor, his gentleness, his friendship, surpassed in wonder the fables of the fairy tales. That day-dream could not last, Beryl said. As happiness had come, so would it go, without warning or farewell.

"Yes," she went on, looking away over the flaming sea as though thither lay his home. "I wish you were my father. You would never go to London then; and, of course, you will go now. People only come here because they want to go away. It is for change, and it does them good. I never get any change, and it doesn't do me good. When you go to London, I shall think all day, and look in the pool to see if you are coming back again; and the pool will say, 'Never, never!' And I shall go on looking, and there won't be any one there, for, of course, there couldn't. It's all nonsense, and yet we do it. If I were old, thirty or forty, I believe I should still look for Wyemarke in the pool."

"Is thirty or forty so very old, then, Beryl?"

"Oh! it's lots! Of course, you are not thirty or forty. I should say—let me see—yes, that's it! I should say you were twenty-three."

He smiled at her conception of youth.

"I am thirty-seven, Beryl; think of it—thirty-seven! That makes me an old man, you know, a very old man! I am just like one who has all my life behind me, and nothing, nothing to look forward to! And you—you have got all the world before you; and some day you will go to London, and you will see it all, and you will think of these days, and perhaps regret them—yes, perhaps you will regret them."

He was speaking more to himself than to her; but Beryl did not like this kind of talk at all, and she hastened to quarrel with it.

"I should like to go to London, because you'd be there, and we could see things," she said quickly. "When the books come, you shall read me all about it; and it will be better than Wyemarke, won't it? My father never reads, and I don't believe he knows what books are. 'A girl's place is in the dairy,' he says; and so I go away and lie on the grass and dream all day. You couldn't do that in London, because there is no grass—Amelia, our servant, used to say so. There were only policemen and soldiers in London, she said; but, of course, she didn't know."

Dudley scarcely heard her. For six months he had shut London from his thoughts, as a man shuts an evil memory. This childish prattle was opening vivid scenes to his mental vision. He beheld a great city, the strife and stress of it, the glitter and the light, the ill and the good. And he thought that never more would the gate of it be open to him.

"In London," he said, as though speaking his thoughts aloud, "in London, little Beryl, are all the riches of the world. In London men stoop to gather gold all the day, and their hands are hurt and their eyes blinded. They do not see the sun, and the treasure turns to ashes in their hands."

Beryl opened wondering eyes. This story, surely, would not be in the books.

"Oh! but it's very silly of them," she said, after she had thought about it for quite a long time; "and—and why do they do it if they don't like it? Aren't there the shops and the theatres and things? I'm sure I shouldn't like London if there are such silly people in it. Let's talk about something else—the books. You promised me——"

Dudley came out of the shadows with an effort and remembered that Beryl was speaking. Her philosophy amused him, as a child's philosophy always did.

"Of course we will," he said brightly; "every day, when the sun shines. I've sent to London,

Beryl, and old Port, the postman, will surprise you some morning. There is something else, too. What do you think of a bicycle, little Beryl ? "

" No ! " she said, her eyes blazing, " you never thought of that, never ? "

" It should be here to-morrow—at least, I hope it will. I'll teach you how to ride, and we can go to Falmouth together and see the shops. That will be jolly. I hope your father won't mind. We must talk to him about it."

She became grave at this mention of her father, as though the word were some blot upon her happiness.

" Oh ! " she said coldly, " father will not mind. No one cares about me—no one at all ! "

Dudley took the child's hand in his and, rising, began to cross the cliff path with her. The sun had set now. A hazy mist loomed above the moor. The night struck damp and chilly, and his heart sank with the day.

" Little Beryl," he exclaimed, as though some great impulse of a forgotten love compelled him to speak, " do you really wish I were your father ? "

" Oh, yes, yes ! " she said gladly.

" I wish it, too ! " he exclaimed fervently. And, bending, he kissed her forehead.

* * * * *

Dudley left Beryl at the cross-roads after pro-

mising her that to-morrow would find him at the rendezvous. Her home, the Headland House, as the fisherfolk called it, was plainly to be seen from this place; and its gloomy outline, black against the western sky, seemed typical of the silence and unfriendliness to be found within its inhospitable doors. Beryl said that her father would not return to-night, and that she would be very lonely until to-morrow came. "But there is always Amelia, and there is always the dog," she remembered; "and you can talk to them."

Dudley, accustomed to the wayward moods, consoled the child with the old promises. He, too, was going to a lonely house. In this, indeed, he found a bond of sympathy between little Beryl and himself. The world had cast them out to this fellowship of sea and moorland, and each could bear something of the other's burden. If any one had told him six months ago that these February days would find him alone and forgotten, exiled by his own act, thrown down from the ladder of life, the silent mystery of a Cornish village, he would have believed him to be a madman. But so it came to pass. He had fled from men, had journeyed hither, thither, to shut the vision from his eyes. And he had failed, failed utterly; and the night brought him the vision still; and by day he found no rest.

He watched Beryl until the shadow hid her, and then struck out across the narrow path by which his own cottage must be reached. Night began to close in upon him as he walked; the wind was rising; sea-mists loomed up above the barren moor. In such a place, at such a time, a man might well believe that he had found the ultimate solitude of his desire and had become the master of it. The moaning blasts which swept the valley echoed Dudley's heart-broken lament. The gathering darkness enveloped him as the shadows of his oblivion. None could see him here, none charge him, none console him. The voice of the accuser was his own. He walked with the dead woman's figure at his side and knew not how she had died.

A lamp burned in the sitting-room of the cottage, and when Dudley drew near he perceived Courvoisier's shadow upon the mean white blind. Nothing could change the fidelity of this prince of servants or send him to better employment. City or solitude, palace or hut, it mattered nothing to Courvoisier. He followed his master like a dog, asked nothing, did not complain. If he had a grievance just now because he must find a lodging in the village, and not, as he would have wished, under Dudley's roof, he never spoke of it. Night and morning he was ready with his skilful service, and but for him his master might have lived on

no better fare than the bread and the milk which the farmers sent. Dudley surprised Courvoisier to-night arranging the letters and papers upon the writing-table which stood in the one bay window of the cottage. From time to time the valet held an envelope very close to the candle and examined it with a minute scrutiny. Some men would have suspected an action so unnecessary, but Dudley thought nothing of it. "He does not wish me to be troubled by busybodies," said Dudley. Courvoisier was undoubtedly a treasure.

In the cottage itself were many signs of the man's foresight and attention. Poor cabin of a place that it was, Courvoisier had done marvels with it. His had been the letter which brought the snowy linen, the rare cut-glass from London; his had been the order to the shopkeepers at Plymouth for the little *secrétaire* and the comfortable lounge and the pictures which hid the time-stained walls. Nomads he and his master might be, but Courvoisier would put soft carpets under their feet and recall the forsaken luxuries. Dudley remembered that cottage in after years and wondered if in all England there was one like it. But he would not have revisited it for a fortune.

It was about five o'clock when he had taken leave of Beryl, and a quarter of an hour later, perhaps, when he opened the cottage gate and waited a

moment, as though some light would shine out to him from the black house on the headland. Though he had no reason for it, an unusual anxiety for little Beryl troubled him to-night. If the village gossips were to be believed, Rhoderick Garth's fortunes were precarious to the last degree. Dudley asked himself what would happen if ruin overtook the Headland House, and little Beryl were driven out. She would come to him, of course—there was no other of whom she might ask help. And where would he harbour her, what provision make for her? His old prudence could busy itself now even with such fanciful possibilities. How different six months ago, when the gold world had been his kingdom and he the master of it!

* * * * *

He entered the house and found Courvoisier busy with the teacups. A bright fire burned in the little grate, a kettle hissed cheerily upon the old-fashioned hob. There were lights everywhere, for Courvoisier understood his master's objection to the darkness and wisely provided against it. A table in the bay window had an orderly litter of newspapers and letters, even telegrams from London. Dudley regarded them wistfully, but knew that he would not answer them. James Macalister, his right hand in the great house of Hatton and Hatton, had been the one man who had heard from him

since his wife died. But Macalister knew his determination now; he rarely troubled him. A clever, shrewd man, he did his best in those untoward circumstances which threatened the fortunes of their house. But he understood that the guiding brain had ceased to think; that the creative genius was with them no longer; that in the end the house must fall, the harvest of ruin be reaped. Dudley, on his part, believed that he had ceased to care. What had money to give him now? Could it lift the shadows and show him the hidden truth? could it banish the torment and the doubt? He said that it could not. He would have bartered all his fortune for that gift of self-acquittal which the truth about Hermione's death alone could pronounce. For the rest, he shunned the world; he sent no message even to those who had called themselves his intimates. And Courvoisier abetted him; he hid the letters when they had been one day upon the table.

"A telegram from Cambridge, from Mr. Romer," the valet remarked when his master came in. "The reply was prepaid, and I said, 'Writing.' I thought you'd wish that, sir."

Dudley, throwing his soft hat into the corner, drew a chair to the fire and poured himself out a cup of tea.

"The boy wants money, I suppose," he com-

mented drily. "He would hardly take the trouble to write to me if he did not."

Curvoisier snuffed the wick of a candle and, being a just man, endeavoured to do justice to Dudley's nephew.

"There are a good many letters from him upstairs," he said quietly. "They tell me he's called three times in Park Lane; I always found him a very nice gentleman, sir."

Dudley's face lost its hard look. He had forgotten that big, merry English lad in these months of exile; but he remembered him now—his boyish light-heartedness, his manly common-sense, and the many other attributes of the public-school boy. And, all said and done, he believed that "Bous," as they called Romer at Cambridge, was fond of him.

"I will write to-morrow," he said in a kindly voice; "remind me, Courvoisier. Is there any one else, anything of interest?"

"Miss Mary sends down a comforter and some home-made jam. She's at Chislehurst with her friends, sir."

"May she stop there!" said Dudley, poking the fire impatiently. "Does Mr. Macalister write to-day?"

"There's a telegram here, sir; I could not deal with that."

Dudley took the yellow paper in his hand and

read the message twice before he took its meaning. It concerned the Great Southern Railway, in whose fortunes he had so vastly interested himself. What would happen to the Great Southern now? How long since he had asked himself that question? Macalister said that the shares had fallen two that day. Dudley tossed the telegram into the fire angrily.

"They will fall a good many twos yet," he thought.

"Is that all, Courvoisier—nothing in the village, nothing new?"

Courvoisier, spreading a white cloth upon the dining-table, showed his contempt for the village of St. Vestall's with a gesture.

"There's not been anything new in this village since Adam, and he's about the latest!" he reflected a little contemptuously. "We've poor company at the inn, I do assure you, sir; mere gossip, and vulgar at that!"

Dudley pulled the cushion up behind his back while he smiled at his servant's notion of vulgarity.

"I was thinking of Rhoderick Garth," he suggested interrogatively; "he's a little later than Adam, is he not?"

Courvoisier hastened to correct himself.

"Oh, yes, if it's of him you are speaking, sir. Mr. Garth, to be sure, is a curious gentleman. You

will hear plenty about him down at the *Blue Dragon*; and no wonder, too, seeing the way he greases their wheels!"

"What do you mean by that, Courvoisier?"

The valet balanced a silver fork upon an outstretched finger and fixed his eyes upon it. He had not words enough to explain himself by useful evasion.

"Well, sir, it's over-delicate to speak of. There are some who say that he gets his brandy too cheap, and some that it might be dearer. I don't know nothing about that myself, but it's good brandy, regular *fine champagne*—and not over-priced when you know where to get it!"

"And you are a connoisseur, eh, Courvoisier?"

"Well, sir, I do know a glass of good brandy when I taste it—and, excusing the liberty, I have brought a bottle for your own particular use."

Dudley had heard nothing so amusing for a very long time.

"What!" he cried, "you would make a smuggler of me?"

"Not that, sir: it's bought and paid for, I do assure you. And there's little more to be got where that came from. The Excise is precious sharp with these poor fisherfolk, sir."

"But Mr. Garth isn't a poor fisherfolk; he's a magistrate, you know."

"That's it, sir; and his brother, who died last month, was Excise officer down here. I won't say nothing about putting two and two together, because they don't make four in these parts, not by a long way. But it's not forbidden to draw an interference, and that the people will do, sir."

Dudley knew that he meant "inference," but he would not have corrected Courvoisier for all the world.

"Does the village, then, seriously suggest that Garth is a smuggler?"

"Oh, no! not that, sir. The village takes what it can get and is thankful. But, you see, the old house is a queer place, all said and done. The cliff's full of cellars, as the story goes, and the late Mr. Garth was fond of port wine, particularly fond of it. This one's fancy seems to be old brandy. If a poor fisherman comes over from France with a bottle or two, or a keg, maybe, in his cuddy, it's natural he should look to the gentleman of the district? I do hear that Mr. Garth has done a wonderful trade in brandy these five year or more."

"His brother being an Exciseman, and he a magistrate! It is lucky we live in a free country, Courvoisier."

Courvoisier shook his head.

"Not so free, begging your pardon, sir. The new officer is a teetotaler, they tell me, and no gentle-

man. We have all our troubles, and I suppose Mr. Garth has his. They say down in the village that the writ's out against him. I do hope it isn't true, sir, I do, indeed. There is no such brandy anywhere hereabouts, as the best judges say."

"And the vendor on his way to prison? Is that what you mean, Courvoisier?"

The valet protested in his humble way against a conclusion so unpleasant.

"Indeed, sir, I hope not. Mr. Garth is a wild gentleman, but I should be very sorry to see misfortune overtake him. And the young lady, too, Miss Beryl—I would not have it happen for worlds!"

Dudley was silent at the mention of little Beryl. "Yes," he said to himself, "it is always the children who pay, in these cases, be they great or small." For the rest he gave little thought to the story. It was quite possible, he imagined, that many a keg of brandy came ashore duty free on that wild coast; but that a magistrate and a petty lord of the manor should use his house for systematic fraud upon the Excise, seemed to him a fabrication worthy of St. Vestall's. Rhoderick Garth would be clever enough to avoid the law. Little Beryl would remain in the bleak house on the hill, and he, Dudley—he would go, aye, who knew whither?

"A pretty scandal, upon my word, Courvoisier,"

he said at length. "Let's hope, with the nigger who heard about the Flood, that it isn't all true. You can bring me another story to-morrow morning; I am much interested."

* * * * *

Dudley dressed for dinner at a quarter to eight, and at nine o'clock Courvoisier left him. Even here in this Cornish waste the old habits of civilization were thus far respected. He lived in a cottage, but the fashion was that of Mayfair. Though he professed no longer to value money, money ministered daily to his comfort. Here, to-night, upon the table were candlesticks of silver, and rare Venetian glass, and wine of historic vintage, and cigars which only a rich or a rash man might presume to smoke. He accepted these things as a matter of course, without reflecting upon the zeal and devotion which had provided them. He would have missed them had they not been there, but missed them uncomplainingly. And Courvoisier's was the ministering hand—so much went without saying. It was bad enough, the valet had said from the very beginning, to live a wild man's life; but exile was not a sufficient reason why the common necessaries should be denied them. And in Courvoisier's eyes the costliest brands, the very finest cigars constituted these necessities. He had a fine palate for these things himself, and his

tastes were properly expensive. "If Mr. Hatton starves, I won't!" was his argument; and certainly he did not.

This far-seeing seneschal, indeed, ordered all things well in that band-box of a house. In attendance almost with the daylight, he did not quit the cottage until the last duty of the night had been performed. There upon the table would be the daily papers nicely cut; the fire blazed cheerily, a kettle hissed merrily on the hob; there were bottles and glasses on the dining-table. Thick curtains shut out the view of the distant sea and the bleak house on the hill. Lamps and candles made the little room as bright as day. No man could do more, Dudley would say sometimes; and yet Courvoisier had a good deal more to do. No sooner had he quitted the house on this particular evening, than he slammed the garden gate ostentatiously, and this being done he ran back to peer through that crevice of the window curtains he purposely had folded. For quite a long time he stood there, a still figure in the deep shadow of the night. Every act, every movement his master made could be seen by the patient servant. How much he would have given to know of what that silent man was thinking! Nevertheless, Dudley remained inscrutable. For an hour, at least, he neither moved in his chair nor looked once towards

the window. When, in the end, he stood up and began to put out the candles one by one, and the firelight shone brightly upon his troubled face, Courvoisier started back and fled from the place as from a house accursed. "He's dreaming still," he said; "he's dreaming still. Well, let him dream! It's worth a fortune to me!"

Dudley, in truth, was dreaming, and his valet, it may be, was the one man in all the world who read those dreams aright. Here, in the silence of the night, when the curtains shut out the west wind's doleful blast, and men and cities were far away, and he thought that none watched him, and sea and moor and village were alike forgotten, he lived again through the feverish hours of his life's great tragedy. Nothing could shut that picture out, no force of will destroy it. From every flame of the ebbing fire, from every shadow of the room, the eyes looked out to his as though to question him. He wrestled, like one in an agony, for the truth he had lost; but the truth defied him. And the visions were about him always. They re-created the past, compelled him to live through it, stifled his cries, put an iron hand upon his heart. Resist them as he would, they carried him back to the evening of the day when Oliver Chaplin had warned him, and he had known that the end of his ambition was at hand—all wagered, all lost, in that

lust of gold. Every detail of the terrible night thrust itself upon his awakened brain. He remembered how he had dined at his club, had returned to his home and had wished to speak to Hermione —the love which animated him, the sympathy he craved. And he had failed to win any response from her ; she had closed the treasure of a woman's heart, and for him it was not to be opened. The moments of that scene recurred one by one, the pity of it, the end ! He saw the woman he had loved lying dead before him. Once more he knelt and kissed the lips which never would answer him again. Once more he cried passionately, " Hermione ! why do you not speak to me ? " He recollected how that servants had come to the room, and he had heard whispered voices, and a figure had thrust itself between him and the dead. But none of these things was the truth. Why had she died ? In what way had he contributed to her death ? Might it even be that he was a murderer ?

Dudley trembled at the thought ; he crouched lower over the fire. The figure of his dead wife stood at his side ; he tried to speak to her, but his lips could not utter the words. He touched her hand ; it was cold as stone. But the eyes, which had no message for him in life, did not reproach him now that she was dead. He thought they looked down upon him with the love that he had known

in the forgotten years. And he would have drawn the figure to him and pressed it close, so that Hermione might say, " You are not guilty " ; but the spell was upon him, he could not cast it off. When, at last, with one supreme effort he recalled his reason and started up with a loud cry, the picture vanished as it had come. And the fire had burned itself to ashes then ; the room was in darkness, the long night at its zenith.

CHAPTER X

STRANGERS AT CASTLE GARTH

DUDLEY was stiff and cramped in every limb when he awoke, and his first thought was of bed and sleep. Usually these dreams left him weak and unstrung, and his experience upon this February night did not prove the exception. His hand trembled when he groped for the candle, and he struck several matches unavailingly before he could get a light. Dreams such as his were potent in their continuing impressions; and even when the candle was lighted and he had peered into every corner of the room, the idea still remained to him that he was not alone. The figure of his sleep hovered about him. Nervous and troubled, he imagined that he could feel a cold breath on his cheek, and the velvet-like touch of an unseen hand upon his own. This hallucination he conquered with difficulty, and was about to quit the room, when some sound from the still world without arrested him, and he became aware that a horse

was being galloped upon the cliff road to the north, and that the rider, whoever he might be, must pass the cottage gate. Such an event at such an hour was rare enough in that bleak place. Dudley remembered what Beryl had told him of trouble in her house, and of her father's journey to Bodmin ; and, wondering if the horseman were in any way connected with it, he slipped on his fur coat and went out to the garden.

A bitter blast of the night slammed the door behind him and extinguished the candle he had lighted. He could hear the thud of hoofs upon the road very clearly now, and they approached him rapidly. But this was not the most surprising thing ; for when he looked over to the headland he saw lights in the windows of Garth's house, and, more wonderful still, the lanterns of some big ship upon the sea. From this, anon, a searchlight flashed out, and, showing all the heights, the great cliff and the waves breaking in the bay, the stony moor and the sleeping grassland, it fell upon the figure of the galloping horseman and made it plain that others pursued him. Dudley knew in a moment, then, that Rhoderick Garth had not been to Bodmin, and that here was the story of his trouble. The man was riding for his liberty, and could he but gain the crest of the ridge and strike the shelving country behind it, he might yet go

free. Dudley had seen no race so pretty since he left Cambridge. After all, he remembered that men do not suffer great things for defrauding the Excise. He wished heartily that the fugitive might escape.

Rhoderick Garth's horse was sweating heavily when he came up to the cottage gate, and the man himself had the wild look of one who knows that discovery is at his heels. He wore a short seaman's jacket and farmer's breeches of cord ; but the wind had robbed him of his hat, and his curly black hair tumbled like a woman's about his face. So powerful was the ship's light that the man and the horse had the appearance of a statue against the background of the hills.

" Is that you, Mr. Hatton ? I thought I saw a light from down yonder. Well, I'm riding to Bodmin and may not be back for a day or two. Will you look after my little girl so long ? Yon chaps are hunting me for a keg or two of good brandy. Time I make the moor, I'll lead them a dance, surely ! Good-night to you, Mr. Hatton—you will not forget Beryl ? "

His horse was champing and rearing while he spoke, and he did not wait for any answer. Behind him, in the hollow of the cliff, mounted police urged forward at all their speed. Dudley had lost sight of them as they went down ; but now the search-

light showed him their peak caps rising on the crest, and he feared that Garth would be taken.

"Ride, man! hurry!" he said, "they are right on your heels!"

Garth laughed bitterly as he let the horse go again.

"Aye!" he said, "the brandy burn their throats! But I'll teach them yet, Mr. Hatton, I'll teach them yet! Good-night, and good luck!"

He raised his whip, and his horse plunged forward at the gallop. Every acre of that ground was known to him, and he rode a perilous course where others would have fallen. The police, on their part, believed that he was already taken. They cantered by the cottage door as men sure of their prey.

"What's the matter, sergeant?" Hatton asked them, "what's the charge?"

The sergeant answered him over his shoulder—

"Murder, likely enough! That's the charge!"

Dudley turned up the collar of his heavy fur coat and leant against the railings, waiting for the end. He could see Rhoderick Garth at this time not more than fifty yards ahead of his pursuers. They appeared to gain upon him, and yet it was difficult to judge distance by such a light. At one moment he thought the man was taken; at another he said he was free. It was years now since

he had been at a coursing match, but this wild ride recalled it to his memory. Here were quarry and dogs, just as they had been then; the shadows were the warren. Let Garth make them, and he was safe. But would he make them? No, his horse was down! Headlong, man and beast went rolling together. It was impossible to believe that the fugitive had yet a possibility of escape. Nevertheless, the impossible was realized. As the police drew up, their horses shied away from the prone figures; the sergeant was thrown, and before the other could bring his horse to obedience, Garth sprang up and was in the saddle again. He gained the ridge this time; the shadows hid both pursuers and pursued.

Dudley waited many minutes at the cottage gate, half believing that he would see the two return with their prisoner between them; but no one appeared, and presently, in groups of twos and threes, the villagers began to make their way toward Castle Garth. Changing "Good-night" with one or two of them, Dudley found his own curiosity provoked and set out himself to learn the truth of the affair. It was in his mind that the sergeant had merely spoken figuratively when he named "murder" as the charge. Rhoderick Garth's dealings with the fisherfolk had been discovered, perhaps, and were serious because of their extent.

Dudley did not know what penalty might be imposed upon a man who smuggled brandy; but he could not believe that it was severe. His anxiety was for the child, awakened to such a lively story of the night. And Beryl would be expecting him. Indeed, she had been waiting for him a full hour or more, and he was but half way across the cliff road when she came running up to him, too breathless to tell her story.

"Oh! I knew—I knew you'd come! The house is full of men—and I was frightened! I do wish father were here! They say it is Mr. Thorpe, the Excise officer. I don't know—I ran away! Oh! what can it mean? what can it mean?"

She was a pitiful figure: dressed in a woman's cloak that was too big for her, and wearing no hat, so that her long, fair hair was caught up by the wind and wrapped about her neck like wheat about its sheaf. Her eyes were tearless; she did not complain. If it were impossible that she knew the moment of that night, nevertheless, the magnitude of her misfortunes was chiefly seen in her father's absence. "Why did he not come? would he ever come?"

"He went away yesterday; but he must have come back! I heard a noise in the night, and oh! —and oh! there was such a bright light on the sea! And then they came up to me, and I heard father's

voice, and I ran away to you. There's some one hurt at the house, and they've sent for the doctor. It wasn't father, for I saw his face. What shall we do? We can't go back there until father comes."

Her story seemed to make all things clear to Dudley, both the reason of the sergeant's words and of Garth's flight. There had been a quarrel, he imagined, at the Castle, and a man had been struck. Afraid of his own act, Garth had fled the scene; it might be, was already on his way to Bodmin Gaol. And if this were so, what tales should he tell to the child who asked with tearless eyes for a father she might never see again?

"We'll go down to the village, Beryl; that's what we'll do. You must sleep there to-night, and I shall come early in the morning. Here's old neighbour Yoxey, and he'll take you down to the inn. Don't cry about it, brave one, but just run away and sleep. I'll come first thing in the morning, and try to bring you good news."

Beryl put her hand upon his arm gently. Her eyes were still tearless.

"You'll go away now," she said; "oh! I know you must go away!"

Dudley laughed to cheer her.

"Yes," he said; "but I shall come back to-morrow!"

* * * * *

A neighbour took the child from the scene, and Dudley hurried on to Castle Garth. He could see that there were several fishing-boats beneath the headland, and men rowed to and fro between them and the Revenue cruiser which had anchored in the shelter of the bay. A searchlight still played upon the face of the gaunt cliffs and illuminated the heights so clearly that every window, almost every stone, of Beryl's home was plainly visible. In the courtyard itself he found a group of chattering neighbours, with some of the Coastguard and Excisemen from Falmouth town. The villagers were not a little surprised to see the stranger amongst them, and they made way for him respectfully, each offering a version of the story—for those in charge to contradict. Dudley answered them with a brief word of thanks, and a smart young officer, recognizing that he had not to do with any one from the villages round about, bade him come to the kitchen fire and warm himself.

"I've been looking for the little girl," he said kindly; "but she ran away. I think we frightened her."

Dudley told him that Beryl had gone down to the inn, and then asked the graver question.

"What has happened? Why has Garth fled?"

"An ugly job, sir. The cellar downstairs is just

about as full of brandy as a ship of rats! We came up here at the order of our people in Falmouth, and Garth turned on us. Jack Fowler, my mate, has got something which will last him a twelvemonth. He was knocked down with the butt end of a gun; lucky for Garth that his skull is thick! I don't suppose he's going to die, but the doctor will have trouble with him. It's a seven years' job for him that did it."

"They have caught him then?" Dudley suggested. "He passed my cottage an hour ago at a gallop, and I saw there were officers at his heels. Yes, he must have been caught."

The man filled a pipe of tobacco and answered indifferently—

"We have not heard yet, sir. You see, they wouldn't tell us. He knows the country like a deer and may slip them in the darkness. But he'll never come back to this house, take my word for it. And what's to become of the child, ask that? Most people hereabouts are too poor to be able to do much for any one. 'Tis the workhouse for the little girl, I imagine—and pretty soon, too!"

Dudley said nothing. Here in this Cornish wild he was learning day by day the value of those riches he had stored so fruitlessly. Poverty, want, suffering were about him on every side. And he could alter it with one stroke of the pen! Exile at least had

taught him this. A man of his fortune could find a thousand such cases—could bring happiness into countless homes and be none the poorer for it. What, after all, was the meaning of that hoard for which he had ventured his leisure, his liberty—it might be his very reason? Figures in a bank-book, bundles of scrip, bonds, shares, the black boxes which locked up his investments. In how many an English house would a hundred pounds of that money be wealth sufficient. And he, of all men, surely had the call to become the people's almoner! He determined that he would begin with Beryl Garth. He tried to imagine what would be the feelings of a child snatched from this gaunt life to be set in the midst of luxuries of which even her roving imagination could have taught her nothing. Yes, Beryl must go to London to-morrow. And he, himself? Was he justified in wrecking the fortune he had built up when, by fortune, happiness such as this might come into the world? Dudley said for the first time in his life that the ambition of riches might be justified.

"I think that I can find a home for the little girl," he said quietly, as he lighted a cigar at the blazing fire. "I must see Mr. Richardson, the vicar, in the morning and speak to him. He was a friend of Garth's, I think?"

"Yes, sir; and a wonderful shock it will be to

him, I'm sure ; not, I suppose, that he'll be sending his brandy back—that would be too much to expect, even from a clergyman ! But he'll be extraordinary sorry to hear that Garth's taken—as I suppose he must be by yon noise."

He indicated with the stem of his pipe the courtyard outside, into which a horse came clattering over the stones. One of the sergeants had returned from the moorland—he whose horse had fallen ; and he limped into the kitchen presently with a doleful tale. To all who asked of him news of the missing farmer, he answered irritably that they must learn patience. In the house, and by the kitchen fire, he admitted that the prisoner had not been taken.

" He be passed by us, surely, in the dark," was the confession. " 'Tis like looking for a round stone in the shingle these moonless nights, but you'm be certain sure the daylight will show us something. And how's poor Jack Fowler doing ? " he went on to ask. " 'Twere odd that he should get a clout from Justice, seeing that he be here at Justice's bidding ! "

He drew near to the fire, repeating this sententious reflection ; and while some one helped him to Garth's brandy, and others, coastguards, farmhands, and neighbours, crowded about the ingle, the company began to speak of the missing man's

good fellowship and of its astonishment at this night's work.

"He always were a neighbourly gentleman, that I do say!"

"And a shining light at Sessions, who'll deny it?"

"He'd never come it over a poor man that had a drop of cider in his vitals!"

"As reg'lar in church, time Sundays, as the parson himself!"

"And now, neighbours, you'm prepared to hear of the closing of this house."

"Aye, what's to become of the darter, Beryl Garth? That be what I'm asking."

"She's had no eddication to speak of, and her hands is not big enough for the milking-pail. She'll be going to London as a governey; 'twere wisdom, surely. What's the good of singing and playing on the pianner, if it's not to make a governey of her?"

The rest agreed. Castle Garth must find a new tenant. Many knew what they would do with the child in such a case; but none offered her a home.

* * * * *

Dudley did not quit this company of gossips until eight o'clock on the following morning. The second of the police-officers had returned then, no more successful than his fellow, and as doleful.

He spoke of a lamed horse and of a dismal night of failure. "But all the countryside is wide awake," said he, "and there'll be many looking for Rhoderick Garth." Dudley imagined that these things would be known already in the village; and although his eyes were hungry for sleep, and the long hours of waiting had tired him, nevertheless he set out briskly for the "Blue Dragon," where Beryl slept. His interest in the petty affairs of this little world of fisherfolk seemed to him as remarkable as it was real. He found himself by turns excited, anxious, conscious of impending change. Was it possible that the course of his own destiny might be altered by this night's work? Would he enter again upon those activities he thought he had for ever abandoned? Would a child lead him out of the solitude to the old life and say, "Behold! it is new"? And if she did, would the shadow pass from him? He knew not what to believe. He went on wonderingly; and as he went he espied Beryl on the sea-shore waiting for him to come.

It was a sunny morning of a premature spring, and the sea lay spread out before him like a sheet of limpid silver. A shimmer of light quickened the fresh young grass; the air was biting as a draught of winter's strength. He had never seen the white cottages look so white, nor the beach

give so many jewels of the sunshine. Indeed, the day invigorated him, and he began to feel that these months of rest were working some miracle at last. He could laugh now at Oliver Chaplin's threat. He crossed the grass-land with a young man's stride.

"Beryl, what are you waiting for—why are you not at St. Vestall's?"

She had been lying on the sands by a still, clear pool which the tide had left; but she sprang up as he drew near and held out both her hands.

"I couldn't sleep—couldn't—couldn't!" she said. "Oh! where is my father? where have they taken him?"

He took her hand and set out towards the cottage.

"We will talk about that by and by, Beryl. I want to speak to you about something else. Let us go up to the cottage and get some breakfast."

She followed him with docility; but when they had gone up a little way, she stopped as upon an impulse and exclaimed—

"You are going away, then—oh! I know you are going away!"

"Why do you think that, Beryl?"

"I dreamed it. I saw your face in the water this morning. You were going away, and there was some one else with you."

"Some one else?"

"Yes, yes; she wore a white dress with gold on the shoulders, and diamonds like stars; and her black hair was all done up in bands, and——"

He stopped her with a low cry. The figure of which the child spoke was that of his dead wife, Hermione!

* * * * *

At twelve o'clock upon that very day the Rev. John Richardson, the vicar of the parish, received a cheque for a thousand guineas for the fisherfolk who lived about Black Head. At one o'clock Dudley sent a long telegram to James Macalister, instructing him what part the house of Hatton and Hatton should play in the coming financial crisis. Many hours had not passed before London knew that the master-mind was at work again, and that the reign of its enemies was over.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAROONED

THE bells of Great St. Mary's at Cambridge were ringing out the first notes of Curfew when Romer Hatton, of Caius (known throughout the University as "Bous," the ox, by reason of his vast bulk), snatched up a remnant of a gown and told his friends in the courtyard that he was about to favour them with his attentions.

"I've just heard from old Pat Foxall," said he, "but I won't keep you half a minute!"

Percy Ellingham, the brightest man in the 'Varsity, and Trevor Webb, on nodding terms, with the law, received this important announcement with some impatience. They were keen on an "after Hall" stroll and cared nothing for Patrick Foxall.

"What does the old blighter want?" Percy asked, without a shadow of respect for the Irishman's reputation. "Is he on the cash hunt?"

"The same security, I suppose?" Trevor Webb

put in—" note of hand and ' Pay you next Tuesday ! ' "

Romer did not gratify this impertinent curiosity. Adorning himself with a much battered cap, and thrusting the letter into a gaping pocket, he descended the stairs three at a time and joined his friends.

" Old Pat's in the Solent," he said, in rare good spirits, " he's with my uncle on the yacht ; so, you see, there's no postscript. He's not likely to want cash while he's in that galley. And, you know, really, he's not a bad sort ! "

" They are always the best of fellows," remarked Percy sagely ; " it's the ' circumstances over which they have no control ' which I object to. Have you ever noticed that a man never borrows money except when his prospects are glowing ? I'm sure when old Pat dies, they'll find ' Pay you next Tuesday ! ' written on his heart. Which reminds me that I'll borrow a cigar, Bous."

Romer produced his cigar-case and sighed as he struck a match upon the Senate House railings.

" Three days to training," he said. " Well, I suppose it's worth the ' going in ' if it's only for the ' coming out.' Try one of these, Percy ; I call 'em the ' In memoriams.' "

" Reminding you," said Trevor, " of the leaves you have turned over ! "

"One to you, Trevor. The memory I refer to is that of the estimable Smallwood, of London. Would he remember me but for those cigars?—not a bit of it! I might be as one dead. As it is, he thinks of me every day. He even sends a man in a draught-board suit to ask after my health. I like to encourage patience. If I paid that man, he'd forget me."

They sauntered on arm-in-arm through the court of Clare, and so to the "Backs." It was a still, warm evening of May, and the setting sun left a roseate hue upon all the gardens and the sleepy river. Flowers were in bud everywhere. You breathed their perfume at every breath. Rooks cawed in the great trees garlanded with the verdant leaves. The lawns were as freshets of the greenest grass rippling down to the lake of waters; and all about were the mirrored images of cloister and chapel and the splendid fanes of the living past. The "Backs" were at the zenith of their beauty; and at their zenith they are unsurpassed in all the world.

"Your uncle's been in London, hasn't he, Bous?" Percy asked, as they stood on Clare Bridge and watched the drifting boats, and heard the splash of the lazy oars beneath; "it's curious that he never comes up to see you."

"That's what I say. He must be better, or he

wouldn't do anything in Draper's Gardens. The firm's been hitting out pretty straight this last month or so, and, of course, there's only one man who could do it. Pat says it's Dudley, and I'm sure it is! But he's a changed man, all the same."

"Wasn't he very ill, Bous—didn't they say he was going mad, or something equally pleasant? They always say that of a successful man. Directly you make a million or so, the men who don't make anything begin to be anxious about your brains. If you went through the Bankruptcy Court, they'd be sure you were sane!"

"I don't think there is much doubt about Dudley Hatton's sanity," Bous remarked with conviction. "He's been in three big things since February, and —well, you've read how much he scooped in. He was very ill after my aunt's death; but that was not unnatural. Old Foxall says that he will never be the same man again. He has the queerist attacks—shuts himself up for days and won't see any one. Of course, if you were very fond of a girl, you would take it pretty badly; but he's taken it very badly indeed, and the worst part of it is that there is no sign of a change."

They smoked for a little while in silence. Presently Percy Ellingham, the profound, delivered himself of a sagacious observation—

"If I were Dudley Hatton, I'd just remember

how much the Chancellor of the Exchequer would bag by my death, and that would keep me alive. Cannot you do something, Bous? He was always very fond of you. Why don't you get him up here for the Mays? He could dine us all at the 'Bull,' and it would inspire confidence in your creditors."

Bous, who had a great affection for Dudley, was always quick to resent this view of his friendship.

"No," he said pathetically, "I wouldn't do that. It's a shabby thing to run a man for his money——"

"And yet money makes the world go round," said Percy.

"Especially after a dinner at the Carlton!"

"Or a bump supper," said Percy. "I've heard a freshman swear that the tower of John's spun round like a top after the last Lents."

"You old rotter, Percy!"

The thread of their philosophy had snapped now, and they were just the undergraduates again. A momentary scuffle, in which gowns were wielded as clubs, resulted in the philosopher's cap skimming away into the Cam, and three heads peering over the bridge to spy it out in the dusk.

"Go in after it, Trevor; I'll hold your clothes!"

"There's no doubt," said Percy, "that it's gutty all through—it floats like a cork!"

"Which shows that it fits a light head," said Romer. "Let's be magnanimous; we'll go and get a boat!"

They hurried off towards John's, and presently were afloat in one of the old tubs that do duty for the Backs. Dusk had come down by this time, and the old colleges shaped in the twilight as the ghostly temples of some great vista of eventide. Boats drifted here and there upon the still river; laughter was to be heard, and ever and anon the tinkle of a banjo or the metallic chords of the mandoline. But the three men were too familiar with the scene to be impressed by it. The humours of the derelict cap were their immediate joy. They chased it, pursued it with fountains of water, caught it, displayed it upon a boat-hook to dry, and then, because there was no other way, rowed indolently towards the mill. When they came to the wall of Queens', where there is a narrow ledge of the buttress bordering upon the stream, Percy Ellingham, standing up in the boat to be sure that the cap was drying, declared that he had seen, through a little window which gave out upon the river, something so remarkable that he must go ashore to observe it more closely. So they put him out upon the narrow ledge, and when he had stood there a moment he invited Romer to follow him.

"Come and have a look, old chap; it really is extraordinary!"

Romer, taken off his guard, lumbered out of the boat clumsily. Strange to say, when he looked in at the window he could see nothing at all; and he had just arrived at the conclusion that it was a hoax when he heard a mocking laugh from the river and espied the others rowing briskly towards Clare. He was marooned upon the ledge; there was no doubt about it.

"We'll call for you in the morning, old chap! Pleasant dreams!"

"Give the Dean my love and say that I always breakfast on caviare and iced champagne!"

"Don't go to sleep, Bous—you might roll off!"

"Rake up a few leaves, old boy—they'll keep you warm!"

The voices were lost in the droning of the night. Romer could just see the black outline of the boat as it disappeared beneath King's Bridge. It was a poor sort of a joke, he thought; but he did not doubt that they would soon return. There he was, stuck upon a ledge not two feet wide, with the grim wall of Queens' behind him and an iron grill on either hand to forbid his passage. Certainly it was not an ideal spot upon which to spend a happy evening. Romer, standing on tiptoe, peered through the window just above his head, but it

showed him an empty room. He sat down and whistled a chorus from the *Toreador*, and the half of an hour passed in this engaging occupation. Once a man in a canoe came almost within hail, but turned at the last moment and went paddling away again. A barge passed on its way to Jesus Lock ; and the bargee's remark, " You are enjoying of yerself, young gentleman ! " seemed to Bous an impertinence. The joke had gone quite far enough he said. He consoled himself with this far from credible assurance ; and perceiving that unless he swam the river and ran a race home (imitating Mr. Pickwick upon a famous occasion), there was no other course open to him but to cool his heels upon the parapet, he lit a second cigar and smoked it philosophically. Certain fine maxims, useful for such emergencies, did not help him at all. He recollected how that Robert Bruce had watched a spider at its web and derived satisfaction therefrom ; but Scotchmen were easily amused, he imagined, and for himself, he did not like spiders. The fatuous occupation of counting sheep jumping over a gate occurred to him as a suitable recreation for elderly gentlemen on winter evenings ; but scarcely to be recommended in such a situation.

" If I go to sleep," Romer said, " I shall certainly fall into the river."

He determined not to go to sleep, and was invent-

ing a dire and malignant vengeance upon the heartless "two," when a light shone suddenly from the window above him, and he became aware that the occupant of the room had returned. Romer never doubted for a moment that a man kept in the rooms. When he pulled himself up by the window-sill and stood on tiptoe to peer in, his astonishment was great.

"By Jove!" he said. "It's a girl!"

Undoubtedly it was—a girl as handsome as her occupation was original. Tall, but not aggressively so, with a clear, white skin, and hair that might almost have been called black, youth apparent in her every gesture, her robe a full one of cloth of gold, a coronet of diamonds, or their imitation, in her hair, the mistress of the room stood before a full-length mirror and believed herself to be one of those heroines of the old time she loved to worship. Presently she turned and with clasped hands began to speak to herself in a low voice. It was precisely at this moment that Romer dropped back to his place upon the ledge and remembered that he was committing an impertinence.

"Who the deuce can she be?" he asked himself; "and what's the meaning of that get-up? I have never seen her in Cambridge, and yet her face—— Good God! but she's just like——"

The reflection, whatever it was, sobered him

in a moment. He stood for many minutes forgetful of the scene and the jest.

It was all so surprising—the room, the light, the dress, and, beyond all, the face of the girl. Romer thought that he was in a dream. The noise of a casement opening suddenly recalled him to himself. The girl leaned out of the open window. She held a candle in her hand; her dress was of the plainest black; she had cast aside the grotesque robe she wore a moment ago.

"Who is it? Whoever is there?"

Romer lifted his battered cap and would have stammered out an excuse, but the words were slow to come. He could see the speaker's face while she held the light aloft, and the likeness it bore to the face of one who was dead struck him as little less than miraculous. "The living image of my aunt Hermione," he said, "the living image!"

He made a new effort and blurted out all his story at last.

"I am awfully sorry," he said, "but, you see, I cannot help it."

For a moment the girl did not know whether to be afraid or to laugh.

"But what *are* you doing there?" she asked.

It was lucky for Romer that she could not see his blushes.

"I—well—I'm out for a little walk. You see, a cap fell into the river, and—er—well, it fell into the river."

She saw it clearly. The tattered gown, which she could now distinguish, reassured her at once. Daphne Bell was often a victim to her own imagination; she could people every garden and court of Cambridge with her own heroes of a day bygone; but for the twentieth century undergraduate she had neither imagination nor respect.

"I suppose your friends put you on the ledge and rowed away," she remarked wisely, after a moment's reflection. "You'll feel very stupid when you go back, won't you? But how *are* you going back?" she asked. "You *never* could get through this window."

Romer looked at the window pathetically, and then at his own broad shoulders.

"No," he said; "it's not to be done. If I were a clown in a circus—but I'm not." And then, his modesty getting the better of him, he ran on: "Pray don't mention it. I rather like it than otherwise!"

She laughed with great delight.

"I suppose you thought that a man kept here—isn't that the word?" she asked frankly.

Romer was greatly encouraged.

"If you'd been a man," he said briskly, "I

could have borrowed your clothes and swum across the river. That's just my luck!"

"I ought to be flattered. Of course, your friends will come back?"

Romer shook his head, as though he were not at all sure of it.

"I'll leave my coat on the bank, and they'll think I've committed suicide—it would score off them to do it in earnest," he reflected dolefully. And then, as though to encourage himself: "After all, I could sleep here. Just think what our fellows have gone through in South Africa!"

"You'll wake up quite a hero," she said optimistically. "I feel it almost unkind to stand in the way of your courage; but don't you think, if I told our porter, he would go and get a boat?"

It had never occurred to Romer.

"Why, of course he would!" he cried, astonished at her simple solution of the difficulty. "I never thought of that; but please see that he doesn't give me away. Porters are brutes, you know—at least, I don't suppose you know, but they are! Of all the various kinds of animals that went into the Ark, the porter must have been the most particular beast! I wonder if yours is an exception?"

The doubt amused Daphne greatly.

"I'm sure he'll do it for me," she said hopefully.

"My grandfather, you know, is one of the senior Fellows here."

"Then we can introduce ourselves. I'm Romer Hatton, of Caius."

"And I'm Daphne Bell—well, I suppose I may say, of Queens'. I'll go and tell the porter now."

She shut the window before Romer's slow wit could stumble upon a compliment about queens. The truth was that he had been much excited throughout this surprising interview. The resemblance to the dead impressed him more strongly each time he allowed himself to look at the girl's face. She was the living image of Hermione—and yet how great a difference! Her light, quick gestures, her bright laughter, the curious magnetism of her eyes, spoke of life and thought and energy. She was not very much older than he, perhaps, and yet from the first he felt that her wish must be his wish. And why had he not met her in Cambridge? A dull logic answered: "Because she has only just come here."

* * * * *

The porter of Queens' sent a boatman to the ledge, and Romer Hatton was rescued precisely at half-past nine o'clock. He did not see Daphne again, nor was there any light in her room when he rowed away. Firmly as he was resolved to be revenged upon his enemies at the first opportunity,

revenge gave place for the moment to the wonder of this chance meeting. True, his own impressions had been formed under circumstances which might well cause them to be unreal. But they remained with him, nevertheless. Daphne Bell, the granddaughter of old Norton Bell, of Queens', stood, in his imagination, almost for the risen dead. He had seen his aunt Hermione—had seen her in that fantastic light; had conversed with her, laughed with her; and yet not Hermione, but another answered him. The night, indeed, excited him as few nights he could remember. Avoiding his friends, he shut himself in his room and wished to be alone. The desire to do something, to profit in some way by knowledge so dramatic, was with him from the first. Others must know and share the secret with him. But whom should he choose for a confidence so momentous. In sheer bewilderment he sat down at last at his desk and wrote to Patrick Foxall. The letter went by the next post to the Solent; and so the great conspiracy began.

CHAPTER XII

ROMER'S LUCK

IN the corner of a third-class smoking carriage on the London train, exactly fifteen days after Romer had written to Patrick Foxall telling him the most curious story his pen had ever written, Percy Ellingham, with an expressive "No!" cast an unseemly doubt upon the story which his friend had just narrated to him.

"You locked the chap in your bedroom and took away the key—immense, positively immense, my dear Bous!"

"It's a fact," said Romer, in spite of this applause. "I'd just come in from the training breakfast and found the beggar in my room. He wanted little here below, but wanted it cash down—seventy-two fourteen three, on account of Smallwood, of London. He wore a draught-board suit in yellow and black, or perhaps I might have paid him. I couldn't write a cheque with a pattern like that before my eyes—it made me bilious. So, you see, I asked him to step into my bedroom and

wait a minute. He's waiting there now, and the door is locked!"

An elderly clergyman, in the corner of the carriage, coughed significantly and folded his newspaper twice. Percy Ellingham laughed as loudly as politeness permitted.

"Do you mean to say that you locked the man in and came away?"

"Well, I turned the key. The bedder had another, but I borrowed it. They might get him through the bars of the window if they can borrow a ladder, but I don't suppose they can. You see, we shan't be back until eleven."

The idea was "immense," as Percy had remarked; but the elderly clergyman reflected unfeelingly upon the graver side of it.

"Excuse me," he said. "I could not help overhearing. Have you left the poor man you mention no food? Perhaps you did not think of it."

Romer sat bolt upright and whistled.

"By George!" he cried, "if he can't eat hairbrushes, he'll starve! I never thought of that! We'll have to go back, Percy! Pull the communicator—stop the train! Do something, for Heaven's sake!"

Percy, disdainful of this appeal and singularly unemotional, took a pipe from his pocket and regarded it with covetous affection. Boat captains

forbade him to smoke, but he derived some satisfaction from the perfume of the ashes, and, as he said, an empty pipe was better than no pipe at all.

"Don't worry," he cried; "the bedder will get him out somehow, even if she pulls down the court. I generally find duns pretty good at getting out—especially when you put on your boots! Give him a cheque when you go back, and he'll think himself the most fortunate man in Europe. They can send him up grub by the fire-escape!"

Bous sighed; he was not by any means convinced.

"It's awfully difficult to do the right thing in this world," he reflected. "A man isn't at his best when he can't smoke. He doesn't reason things logically. Fourteen days have I been without tobacco, fourteen days and smoker's days—twice as long as it took to make this ancient Universe!

They groaned together in spirit. The boats of Caius were in training; but this day was a day off, and Percy and Romer had determined to go to town. Percy went, it may be, because Romer was going; and Romer went, perhaps, with the vaguest idea that he might hear something of his uncle Dudley.

"You see," he said, "I ought to call at Park Lane, even if he isn't in town. Perhaps he will be. He's been there once or twice since Easter. If I

have any luck, I'll catch him, though I suppose he has forgotten all about me."

Percy had no opinion to pronounce upon a state of affairs of which he understood so little. He could not perceive any possible use to which a millionaire might be turned if it were not to get money out of him.

"We can go to the Gaiety, anyway," he said consolingly, "and afterwards we might order a training dinner at the Carlton. I should like to see the face of the head waiter when I call for a rice pudding!"

"And I should like to see your face when you pay for it! I suppose we are to consider ourselves as leaders of taste. We might set a fashion at the Carlton—chops and rice pudding and an orange afterwards! Entertaining wouldn't cost you much on that scale, and Harley Street would be in the Bankruptcy Court.

Romer fell to a moody silence. This was his third year at Cambridge, where he owed his career to Dudley Hatton's generosity. Tradesmen, who had washed their hands over him six months ago and protested that the last thing under heaven that they desired was ready money, now, at the rumour of Hatton and Hatton's embarrassment, demanded money unceasingly. It is true that he had received a generous allowance and had spent it generously; but in the old days, Dudley added to it

such considerable presents that Romer never thought of debts at all or permitted them to embarrass him. And so the last months of those pleasant years had come. His father, a poor country clergyman, could do little to establish him in the way of life to which his uncle's munificence had accustomed him. He had relied on Dudley absolutely. It had always been understood that he was to enter the house of Hatton and Hatton and share its splendid fortunes. They said, at Cambridge, six months ago, that he was the luckliest man alive; but to-day Romer knew no more than the dead what his future would be. The wildest stories of his uncle's health came to him from London. Dudley himself never wrote. There was no answer to that excited letter he had sent to Patrick Foxall—indeed, the episode at Queens', so brief, so fantastic, stood out as the memory of a dream. Romer had never seen Daphne Bell again nor heard of her being at Cambridge. For a moment, at a window, he thought that he had looked upon the face of the dead. It must have been an hallucination, he said.

* * * * *

At King's Cross, Percy took a hansom to the New University Club, but Romer went on to Park Lane.

"I'll meet you at the Gaiety, anyway, Percy," he said; "I must call upon my uncle, and I don't

care much to go into the City. I hope I'll find the old chap well."

It was like the expression of a forlorn hope; and, in truth, Romer was not a little excited when he knocked at the door of his uncle's house and waited for the familiar face of Spiler, the butler. He had half expected to find the house garbed still in its winter robe of brown paper; but this was not the case, and it had the bright aspect necessary to London's season. The great flower-boxes were full of marguerites; he could see the servants moving briskly in the kitchen, and when the door was opened to him, it was by that monument of dignity, Spiler himself.

"Your uncle's not at home, sir, but Miss Beryl is," the butler said in his lofty way. "I think she'd be glad to see you."

Romer lurched into the hall, wondering if he had heard aright.

"Miss Beryl! Who's Miss Beryl, Spiler? And why does she want to see me?"

"It's the young lady that came from Cornwall, sir."

"The young lady who came from Cornwall—well, what's she doing here, Spiler?"

"Master's orders, sir—the whole house is to be kept up just as if he was at home. Here *is* Miss Beryl, sir."

A figure had come to the head of the great staircase while they talked, and Romer, looking up, perceived a girl of fifteen or sixteen years of age, who was dressed in a simple gown of white, and whose abundance of pretty flaxen hair knew little of the comb and less of the ribbon When she tossed her head and the hair fell back, Romer admitted that it was a pretty face.

"You're Romer!" she said excitedly. "I've heard about you, so we needn't wait to be introduced. Aunt Mary's gone shopping, so I'm Number One. Please come in and sit down."

The speech was unconventional Cornish, but Romer ignored this. He handed his hat to the lordly Spiler and went upstairs to the morning-room, asking himself what the meaning of it all might be.

"So you're Beryl, eh? Well, that's something," he said at hazard. "Have you been long in London? I don't remember my uncle speaking of it."

"Oh! you wouldn't. He doesn't speak of it. I wish he would. It's weeks since—since he spoke of anything," was Beryl's answer. And then in a most formal manner she asked him—

"Will you take a cup of tea?"

"Tea? Why, it's only eleven o'clock—I've had breakfast, thank you."

Beryl flung herself a little indignantly upon a

sofa and curled herself up as she was wont to do by the pool on the sea-shore at Black Head.

"You always ask people if they'll take tea when they call upon you. Aunt Mary says so. And you never speak about their relations, because it's dangerous. You see, I'm only learning. I began—oh! it was weeks ago, when my father went to America. We came up here; they taught me things. I thought at first it was the King's house, but it isn't. It's a 'desirable mansion,'—the board next door says so, and so it's all right. But I shall like it better by and by. The big man with the horrid voice frightens me sometimes; and, of course, I don't tell Mr. Hatton, but I'm sure he'll die of over-eating some day!"

Romer, amazed at this recital, found the child as pleasing as she was loquacious. He guessed in a moment that she was unwillingly the recipient of Dudley's charity. He encouraged her revelations.

"When is my uncle coming back, Beryl; do you happen to know that?"

"No, I don't. Shall I call you Romer? Well, I don't, Romer. I don't know anything at all. I'm sure I'm living in a dream; and Spiler—yes, he's the wicked uncle. Oh! it's all so grand; and we eat, eat, eat all day; and in the dining-room there's more silver and gold than in all the shops at Ply-

mouth. I've seen it and I know. I wonder Mr. Hatton doesn't take it all away with him when he goes on the yacht; but you see, the other man, that Courvo—Courvo—I never can say that——"

"Courvoisier?"

"Yes, the dark man who looks so angry. Well, he'd have to carry it, and he couldn't. He always goes away with Mr. Hatton, him and the noisy man—should I say 'him' or 'he'?—but it doesn't matter, I'll say both; and he goes away, and I don't see any one, and there's no one here but the 'wicked uncle'—and, you know, I'm lonely sometimes, lonely, lonely, lonely—and then I'm ungrateful, which is the serpent's tooth, as Aunt Mary says, though why it is I can't say a bit!"

She babbled away like a bird at dawn, while Romer sat quietly and watched her. The face interested him greatly. Beryl seemed to be thinking of something else all the time she was speaking. Anon she told him of the circumstances which had brought her to London, and of Dudley's flying visits to town.

"He comes and he goes, but he will never sleep here. Now, can you understand that? I wonder sometimes if it's because Aunt Mary's here. She says it's a sin not to wash the pocket-handkerchiefs at home, and he won't do it, and, of course, I would, but there's no copper; and one day I went

down into the kitchen—oh! they stared just like they stare at a stranger in our church! So I've not been again, and Mr. Hatton says I'm not to—and, oh! it would be all right if he would come home. But he won't. He's always on the yacht. Do you know, I think he's frightened of the house——"

"Frightened! My uncle Dudley frightened?"

"Yes, he came here one night, and I went to bed; and when I thought I'd slept all night—don't you ever do that, and find you've only slept a bit, and get cross with the clock for only being twelve?—well, I got cross with the clock that night, and I opened my door to look at the time by the golden woman in the hall who is always holding up a glass ball, and then I saw Mr. Hatton standing just by my door, and he was white and shaking, like my father when brother Dick was drowned at sea, and he stood there a long time, and I was so frightened I didn't know what to do, and at last I said, 'Oh, Mr. Hatton!' and he turned round and put both his hands to his eyes, and then he came towards me and said, 'It's only little Beryl'; and I said, 'Yes, yes, it's only little Beryl'; and, do you know, he'd been crying. I was so sorry; I cried myself, for I'm very, very, very fond of him, and he's so good to me; and now he'll not come back I'm sure of it—he hasn't been back

for a month. Oh! he'll never come back any more——"

The recital ended with pathetic abruptness as though she were afraid of her own confessions, and Romer, in his turn, was too astonished to answer her. This amazing story fitted so curiously into that whisper of a terrible rumour which had followed his aunt Hermione's death. "How awful!" the boy was saying to himself, "if there should be anything in it!" But he put the thought from him like an evil thing and would not even debate it.

"Beryl," he said, "do you think my uncle is very unhappy?"

"I'm sure he is."

"Then we must make him happier, you and I, Beryl—I've got a notion. He'll do things for you, won't he?"

"He's been so good—oh! I know he would."

"Then tell him that I, Romer, think it very unkind of him never to come and see me at Cambridge. Will you tell him that, Beryl?"

"Of course I will; I'll write it."

"And you'll make him come?"

"I'll say, 'Please do.'"

"He'll come for that?"

"Yes, yes, if I say 'Please do.'"

"We could make him happier, Beryl—we must."

"And, perhaps, he'll come to live here—oh! Romer!"

She clasped her hands in childish excitement. But Romer's thoughts were already far away. What summons of Destiny had called him to Park Lane to-day? The face at the window of Queens'—the girl so like the dead! Was it written that Dudley's salvation lay there? Romer knew not what to believe. His own troubles were so pitiful side by side with a man's adversity, it might be his very salvation.

* * * * *

He dined that night with Percy Ellingham at the Carlton. When asked if there were any luck, his answer had some spirit in it.

"My uncle's adopted a kid, and she's pretty," he said.

"Adopted a kid! My poor Romer! I drink vinegar to your misfortunes—the villainy of it."

"I'm not so sure, Percy. Time will tell. Let's have a pint of Heidsieck apiece. It's good if you're a bit off colour."

"Then say I'm purple—but, my dear Bous—the kid!"

Romer sighed.

"She'll make a beautiful woman some day," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

"DANGER"

ROMER at the Carlton had spoken of his luck with some confidence. Had he known of it, he would have declared it not a little curious that the subject of their discussion should come to London that very day. Dudley Hatton, indeed, arrived at Waterloo Station just as the sagacious undergraduates were leaving King's Cross for Cambridge. An urgent summons from his chief-of-staff, Macalister, found him in one of those moods when he was not averse from business. Spasmodic and fitful in all his acts at this time, he would attack the greatest problems one day, to leave others no less important the next. There was no stability in his plan of life, nor any definite purpose of it. The nervous breakdown, against which his doctors warned him, culminated in these changing resolutions. There had been weeks since his wife's death when the old brain had been at work, the old genius paramount. Such weeks, helped by

Macalister's plodding habits, maintained the fortunes of the house of Hatton and Hatton. The shrewd Scotchman could not invent, but he could control as few others. The City began, at length, to perceive the drift of affairs. The great Trust, which had been created to overthrow the English house, raged vainly but accomplished nothing. Those who knew the whole of the facts did not hesitate to say that Dudley's credit had never stood higher. He had saved his millions, if he did not add to them. Let him return to Draper's Gardens, they urged, and the foreign bubble would be pricked in a month. A few of the most intimate declared with conviction that Jan Beckstein and his gang strove, above all things, to keep Dudley from London. There were scandalous gossips who did not scruple to aver that the foreign syndicate would employ any means, however base, for the achievement of their purpose.

If there were anything in these tales, Dudley did not care a snap of the fingers for them. For the most part he lived upon his yacht, now exalted in spirit, now at the nadir of depression. One summons alone was powerful to recall him, and that was any story of commercial intrigue. This very day the faithful Macalister had sent a long telegram indicating some move to which the master-mind alone might reply. Dudley, who

yesterday had declared that he would go to the East, returned to London by the first train. The contest of wills excited him. He was like a dram-drinker long deprived of his drugs. The call to activity cleared his brain and put aside his brooding melancholy. He went to London with pleasure; but he knew that he would quit it before a week had passed.

He was alone to-night, for Courvoisier, his valet, had but yesterday begged a little holiday and gone, as he said, to Paris to enjoy it. Dudley had not meant to stay at Park Lane, nor did one of his own broughams meet him at the station. He could not bring himself, let his resolution be what it might, to sleep again in that house where Hermione had died. He knew that it was folly of the gravest kind, but such folly as men succumb to in spite of themselves. So to-night he had ordered a bedroom at Claridge's, and would have driven there but for a sudden memory of little Beryl and his promise to her. It was not yet nine o'clock; why should he not see Beryl? He called a hansom and told the driver to go to Park Lane.

It was a dull night of May, with a wet shimmer upon the blinking pavement, and flickering gas-jets to speak of storm. The thunderous noises of the streets jarred upon the ear of a man fresh from the music of the sea and the silence of a ship's deck.

Dudley watched the struggling hordes in the Westminster Bridge Road, where the gas-jets flared upon their haggard faces, and wondered why some of them were content to live. The river, black as night save where great bunches of lights gave it moon-gold lakes, flowed as a living barrier between the city of the rich and the mean streets of the poor. The lantern above the Houses of Parliament reminded him that the Commons were sitting, and spoke of the political babbler and his puny affairs. He fell to asking himself how much some of these legislators would be worth as clerks in his own business, or even in any honourable employment. His own splendid powers, creative and of organization, inspired him to a just contempt for the political profession and its inanities. And from this he went on to think of the contest in which he must engage to-morrow, and of the moves by which he would defeat the Dutch conspiracy. He was in the middle of it by the time they had entered St. James's Park, and had already come to a clever resolution, when a brougham passed his cab at a good round pace, and, chancing to observe its occupant, all the current of his thoughts was turned in a moment.

"By Jove!" he cried, "it's Courvoisier!"

His own valet! In evening dress; in a brougham that must have cost a hundred and fifty pounds;

driven by a coachman in the smartest of liveries—drawn by a horse which would have fetched a long price at Tattersall's! Dudley remembered instantly that Courvoisier's wages were a hundred pounds a year. Men do not keep single broughams upon a hundred pounds a year, or mix in fashionable society by the aid of such a modest competence. Besides, was not Courvoisier in Paris? An unworthy curiosity prompted him to ask why the fellow had lied to him, and to endeavour to discover his reasons.

"Follow that carriage," he cried to his cabman through the trap; "the single brougham just ahead of us. I'll give you five pounds if you don't miss it."

The cabman sat up as though he had received an electric shock. He threw away his cigar in his excitement.

"Five pounds! What! him with the roan and stepper? You're there all the way, guv'nor!"

He slammed down the trap and touched up his horse. The brougham went at a smart trot across the bridge to St. James's Street. Dudley was sure that Courvoisier had not seen him, for the valet had been looking out of the other window when the brougham passed. His stout little cab-horse had much to do to keep pace with the high stepper in the carriage; but a block at the top of St. James's

Street saved the situation, and they were not twenty yards behind when they turned into Piccadilly and so went by Devonshire Street to Berkeley Square. From this point the chase was exciting. It reminded Dudley of his old hunting days. And where was the quarry making for? The cabman, pulling his horse almost on its haunches, told him as he asked the question.

"He's setting down, sir, over there in Charles Street."

He drew aside beneath the shelter of the trees in Berkeley Square at a place where an empty cab might stop. The brougham was a hundred yards away, perhaps, in a dark place of the street. Dudley could see the man, whoever he was, engaged in giving driections to his coachman; and, wishing to identify him even at some risk of detection, he told the cabman to go on.

"Walk your horse down the street. I don't want to be seen—you understand?"

Cabby said that he understood, and they went on again, at a crawl this time. The brougham had already left its owner upon the pavement, and he stood there, looking up and down the street like a man who fears that he is watched. The approaching cab did not alarm him. Dudley, taking off his hat, sat back while they passed the place; but he saw the man clearly, and his doubt was satisfied.

He was Courvoisier! Then what was he doing here, in London, when he had begged a holiday to go to Paris? The cabman answered the question before they left Charles Street.

"He's gone into No. 14B, sir; it's an empty house, I think."

Dudley sat back in the cab and laughed.

"What a fool I am!" he cried. "The man's wearing evening dress for swagger, and 14B is probably kept by a retired housemaid. But how on earth did he get into a brougham?"

He laughed again.

"The property of a gentleman going abroad," he reflected wisely. "I suppose that's what happens to all our carriages the moment we turn our backs!"

He drove to Park Lane, despising, perhaps, that very curiosity which had detained him. Nor could he foresee the dangerous part which 14B, Charles Street, was to play in his own life at no distant date.

* * * * *

Beryl came down the stairs four at a time when she heard his knock and positively leaped into his arms.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling with pleasure, "it is—it is—it is! And I said you'd come, and she didn't! And we were reading the 'Holy Land,' and

I hate it! And you'll stop—you'll stop to-night, won't you?"

Dudley gave his coat and hat to the sanctimonious Spiler, and, taking Beryl's hand, permitted himself to be led upstairs. This love of a child's voice was a new thing in his life. He asked himself what kept him from little Beryl's side so often. If she were Hermione's daughter, how different it had been!

"I do not think I can stop to-night, Beryl," he said; and added more gaily, "but I'll come to-morrow—I promise you."

"You won't—you won't!" she protested excitedly. "You'll go away to that horrid yacht, and I shall wait, wait, wait, and there won't be any rings except the butcher's! Oh! I know. You promise it, and you won't; and it's unkind of you——! That's what Romer said this morning—he's been here, you know, and I like him; and he wore a black coat just like a clergyman's. I said you'd go to Cambridge if I asked you, because he thinks you're unkind. But I do ask you, and you will go —oh! say you'll go!"

He smiled at her enthusiasm and entered the drawing-room, that great room he had seen but once since his wife's death. It was just as Hermione had left it—the stately ornaments, the glow of lights, the costly china; but there were no flowers, except a few bunches of primroses which

Beryl had bought from a man in the street. Thus the habit of Cornwall thrust itself upon the garish splendour of Park Lane; Dudley thought that he preferred the primroses. Aunt Mary scarcely counted in the inventory.

"Well, aunt, and how are you to-night—and what's the news you've got for me?" he exclaimed cheerily.

"Ah!" droned the old lady vindictively; "plenty of news for those that will hear it! The third week of May and the carpets not up! Pretty news that for a master's ears! And a houseful of busybodies that I'd send packing if I had my way! Oh! plenty of news, Dudley!"

He drew a chair near to her little table, while Beryl, curled up like a dog, sat at his feet and held his hand.

"You'll not be angry, will you?" she asked. "I think the carpets are all right, and we'll sweep them if you'll stop. Oh! you will stop just once, won't you?"

Aunt Mary added her economic protest.

"Wasting good money at a hotel, with so many poor people that haven't got bite or sup! I call it sinful, Dudley. I couldn't sleep in my bed at night if I did such a thing!"

Dudley, stroking Beryl's hair, asked himself why he should not gratify her.

"Just for this night, eh, Beryl? Well, suppose I came and stopped here always?"

She gave a glad cry.

"No!" she said, with all a child's joy, "it would be too lovely!"

* * * * *

He had made the promise; and not until he was alone did he begin to realize what these hours in Park Lane would cost him. Away upon his yacht, in the solitudes, among remote people, he had been permitted to forget that night of nights; but here it must be lived again. His study, his bedroom, Hermione's boudoir—the figure haunted him everywhere. And this in spite of a will made stronger by rest and reflecting a man's determination. He told himself, when Beryl went to bed, that no retrospective accusation, whatever it was, should come to disturb his sleep or to befool him with its charges. But no sooner had the child left him than the old influences were at work, the old doubts reborn. Even the silence echoed the whispering of voices. He answered them by asking why his own house should thus affright him. Was he conscious of guilt? Of all the hallucinations with which an overtaxed mind had afflicted him, must this terror of the doubt remain to the end? A lover of simple issues, he put the whole story in its baldest aspect, and would thus confront it. Her-

mione died almost at his feet. Was his the hand that struck her down? He did not believe that it was; nevertheless, he could discover no satisfying hypothesis. In the heart attack he did not wholly believe. He would have given the half of his fortune to have known all.

It was very quiet in the great house when Beryl had gone to bed, and he went up reluctantly to that study which had been his haven from the social warfare in the old striving days. The stately Spiler had switched on the lights there and placed cigars and glasses by his long-deserted chair. Such letters as were private, and had not fallen into the hands of secretaries, were arranged upon the writing-table in two little heaps with a longer envelope between them. Dudley regarded them askance, for he was one of those who never answer letters; but when he had lighted a cigar and pulled his chair nearer to the table, he began to read the post-marks, and from that the letters themselves. They proved to be, as he had imagined, typical of the energy of curious friends. Some of them promised him untold millions in exchange for trifling loans; others set out the claims of good servants of the King, who lacked the humble crown. There were invitations to dinners long since eaten; full accounts by poor relations of the state of their fortunes and the health of their children. These

went into the waste-paper basket with the others; but the long envelope attracted Dudley by the familiarity of its sprawling address. He thought that he knew the handwriting, and yet could not absolutely identify it. It was a little like Patrick Foxall's, but not altogether so. When he opened the letter, a photograph fell out. He picked it up, and, lifting the tissue-paper which covered it, he saw the face of his dead wife Hermione.

* * * * *

Very slowly and deliberately Dudley turned the envelope about and read every word inscribed upon it. It had been posted, he saw, in Newmarket, nearly a week ago. The photograph itself was the work of a Cambridge photographer. Dudley held it in his hand a very long time, quite unable to define the sensation which he experienced upon its discovery. This picture of his dead wife—whence had it come, what meaning must be attached to it? And who had ventured upon such an impertinence as to purchase and despatch it? It had been taken, no doubt, when Hermione was in Cambridge—but he remembered, as in a flash, that she was never, so far as he knew, in Cambridge in her life. Then what was the significance of it? He studied the features, one by one, the dress, the hands, tried to read the message of the eyes; and as he read and looked the truth came at last.

"It is not Hermione!" he cried aloud.

The half of an hour passed and found him with the picture still upon his lap and the unsmoked cigar between his fingers. Never once during that time had his eyes left the face which looked out to him from the photograph. The wonder of it waxed greater with each succeeding moment. Whence had this thing come, and why did it come? If it were not the portrait of the woman he had loved, why should he be asked to interest himself in it? So real was the likeness that he brought himself at one time to believe that he held the picture of Hermione in his hands, and looked upon the dead whose voice he would never hear again. But the truth remained paramount in the end.

"It is not Hermione—it cannot be!" he cried passionately.

The conviction paralyzed his will. He laid the picture aside and would not look at it; took it into his hands once more and studied every feature of it; was dazed, tortured, as though by some stupendous unreality born in the silence of the night. Did the woman of this picture live, or was it all a jest? Men do not jest with death, he remembered. Whoever had sent him this message had sent it with a purpose. The dawn light found him wondering still what that purpose might be.

* * * * *

At the breakfast table early next morning he told little Beryl that he would go to Cambridge. Almost at the same hour the valet, Courvoisier, sent to the Dutch house of Beckstein, Limited, a telegram containing the single word, "Danger."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAGICIAN ON THE BANK

PERCY ELLINGHAM helped himself to a fat chop while he exclaimed upon the paradox of the letter under consideration.

"He calls himself your obedient servant and says he'll have to writ you, does he? The infamy! I'd put a man like that on bread and water—strike him off the rolls, you know! He's a disgrace to a dishonourable profession!"

Romer Hatton, in no way behind his friends in the consumption of mutton chops, sighed pathetically when he reflected upon the vanities of life and the particular vanity which had brought him this insulting epistle.

"It all came," he said, "of locking up that chap the day we went to London. They didn't get him out until four o'clock, and then they had to force the lock. I told Smallwood that if he wants money, he really must not send me a man in a draught-board suit, and he didn't take it like a

gentleman. After that we were not on good terms —mine were distant and his were cash!"

"It's no good cutting men like that," said Percy dogmatically, "their hide is pachydermatous. You will have to do something desperate, Bous—pay him or something—I hope he hasn't got heart disease!"

Trevor Webb, the third of the trinity, was not more encouraging. His fine knowledge of procedure helped him to a gloomy picture of that which might happen to Romer in case he neglected to do this desperate deed.

"They'll cart you away in a van like a stag," he said cheerfully. "We don't imprison men for debt nowadays, we only imprison them for having no money. You'll probably get three weeks and be set to scrub floors. Imagine what you can do in three weeks, Bous! Why, you might read half Shakespeare!"

The three were in Romer's rooms, partaking of a training lunch, on the second day of the paradoxically styled "May races." A tremendous dish of chops testified to the oarsmen's fast and the hardships of it. The men drank college beer from pewter flagons and ate rice pudding with the docility of children. That gentle measure of excitement which animates all rowing men in the race week stimulated the frivolity of their talk

and buoyed them up with a great hope of the day. Last night had seen a magnificent struggle between Hall and Caius; but the latter had not made their bump, although they had been within an ace of it. To-night they were confident of victory. If any doubt troubled this healthy crew, it was their anxiety for Romer Hatton, their five, who flagged in spirit and was palpably depressed. Romer's measured extravagances had culminated to-day in a communication from Flower and Flower, of London, intimating that the patience of Mr. John Smallwood, cigar merchant in that city, was at length exhausted, and that he must resort to the law to obtain such satisfaction as mere guineas could afford him. Romer read the letter three times before he folded it up and placed it neatly in that pocket of his coat which lay nearest to his heart. He had a vague idea that the customary promise of an early remittance would not suffice on this occasion. Smallwood was lost to all sense of decency—and a matter of money should never be mentioned between gentlemen.

"I suppose I'll have to pay him," he said, lurching from the table dolefully. "There's nothing like treating these fellows with contempt! The money's another matter! I'll pay him and——"

"And make your uncle write a cheque, eh?" said Percy. "Well what does he exist for if it isn't

to have his signature honoured ? He ought to consider it his vocation in life. You should send him the lawyer's letter in a black-edged envelope, Bous ! "

The idea was immense ; but Romer was not captivated by it. Since he had been deserted, as he said, by his uncle Dudley, an inherent pride had forbidden any appeal to his kinsman's generosity. Hitherto he had accepted as a matter of right that extravagant allowance which Dudley had so generously provided him ; but now, when he ceased to hear any news of his benefactor, and the old bonuses were not forthcoming, he began to realize that, after all, he had no title to this generosity and must be prepared for the loss of it. Romer believed that he could get his living in London well enough. But his third year's settlements at Cambridge were another matter. Like many a third year man, he cursed the day which first had introduced him to such a polite system of apparently beneficent credit. At twenty-one, these petty financial embarrassments were as keenly felt as the graver responsibilities of the serious life. If Dudley did not help him, he feared that his University career would end in disgrace. But this he concealed carefully from his friends and did his best to share in their frivolity.

" We'll bump Hall to-night, anyway," he said,

like one trying to convince himself; "that's something to begin with. The rest doesn't matter. If I go to prison, you chaps will have to visit me. We might have a rubber of bridge, and get the warder to make a fourth."

"You can play piquet with the Governor o' nights," suggested Percy cheerily.

"Or patience, on the cold, cold floor!" was Trevor's idea.

Percy's second suggestion was even more practical.

"The bow was made in England. You might while away the hours, Bous, finding out where the broad arrows come from!"

"He'll write a book on the crime of wealth!" added Trevor.

"Never mind, Bous, old chap; 'stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage!' I'll teach you how to hide a file in your boot. You might practise letting yourself in and out of the window with Trevor's pyjamas!"

The banter compelled Romer to forget his woes. He put the lawyer's letter upon the chimney-piece, as though it were an invitation to a dance or dinner, and fell to discussing the coming race.

"I wish I felt more like it," he said complainingly; "but we're going to bump that Hall crowd, and hang the expense! I suppose it will be the

usual thing, old chap—forty up to first post, and hell and leather afterwards ! If those fellows hadn't sprung their rattles at Ditton last night, we'd have done the trick ; but you took it up too quick, Trevor. We'll have a good man on the bank to-night and it will be different."

"Mind you row all your fourteen stone of beef, Bous, and no down in the dumps ! Of course you will. You're right enough. If you're not, we'll doctor you with fizz ! There's nothing like a glass of fizz if a man's ailing. And I tell you what, old man, if we don't bump those beggars, I shall go all the way to London, to smash up your friend Smallwood ! "

"Cast his ashes to the winds," put in Trevor mildly, "as Bous has been doing for the last six months. It's an expensive amusement, I imagine."

"And ends in smoke, like other amusements," said Percy. "That's where the Hall's going to end to-night. Let's get off to the river. Here's the whole crowd under way."

He indicated a stream of flannel-clad men and their people trudging down Trinity Street towards John's and the boathouses. It was early yet in the afternoon ; but the match at Fenner's was over ; and all Cambridge thought of the boats. The Cam herself came as near to a merry aspect as that odorous ditch can ever assume. Flags were flying

from all the masts ; tubs, randans, odds and ends of craft swarmed together towards Ditton and the chief seats. Stately dons, who wore a noble aspect in the Master's gown, went humbly along the towing-path, mere puny figures in their coats of flannel. Light-hearted runners sprang their rattles and jangled their bells, to be sure that these implements of torture would answer at the crisis. Cousins, who had come to Cambridge full of loyalty, declared that the river was beautiful and the railway bridge a very gem. In the Long Reach itself the racing craft were already being moored by matter-of-fact boatmen to equally matter-of-fact stakes. Here upon the towing-path the racing men were gathered. Their gaudy blazers gave a necessary colour to the dun-coloured background of marsh and fen. Some of them wore flowers in their straw hats—these had made bumps last night. Others wore no flowers, and walked with some dejection—these had not made bumps last night. But everywhere the latent excitement was betrayed in the animated gestures of the men, in their quick movements and spasmodic talk.

"Mind you take it up, now."

"If we're ahead at Ditton it's all right."

"Look here, you fellows; a quarter stroke and then a half—don't you forget!" This from an anxious coach.

"When I spring the rattle, you're within half a length of them. Mind you buck up then and keep it long."

"Now, old chaps, row like blazes to Grassey, and you'll down them!"

These were the fragments of talk to be heard on the towing-path; but, yonder, at Ditton, the babble was lighter; and the famous corner seemed like a quivering rose of blazing colours, which opened its petals upon the hillside and gathered leaves of the fresh green grass-lands. Here were the "people," and those others whom a cynic has named "Bills Payable," which is to say, the fathers of the families. In this place flannels rubbed elbows with dainty muslins; chiffons were cheek-by-jowl with coats of many colours; non-rowing men made good their athletic deficiences by ample success in a lighter field. *La jeunesse* predominated, and the laughter of young girls was the reigning note.

A gun boomed, signalling to the First Division crews to go down to the starting-post, and the Caius eight quickly entered their boat. Alternately rowing and paddling a few strokes, they came to Ditton, and there rested upon their oars a moment before that brilliant gallery. Romer Hatton, from his seat at five, scanned the faces quickly in the vain hope that he might discover one of his own kith and kin; but all the "roses" were unknown to him; and

at the word "Paddle!" he was glad to be moving again. Perhaps the depression which attended him that day was in a measure the depression of contrasts. It had been so different last year, when Dudley had stayed at the "Bull," and great dinners had been given, and feasting and merriment came first, and money was unthought of, and all the boyish delight of success and applause helped his natural fund of high spirits. Romer did not think that Caius would bump Hall to-night; but he was certain that if they did, Uncle Dudley would know nothing of it. Ashamed of himself for rowing with so little spirit, he frankly admitted that he could not help it. Even at Baitsbite, the starting-post, the crew chaffed him upon his doleful gait.

"You look as though you'd dropped a five-pound note through a sewer grating," said the captain of the boat. Romer answered that he believed he had. "But you're going to row like blazes to-night!" the captain added.

"Of course I am!" said Romer. He was very nervous—what man is not?—in those dragging minutes of delay the crews must pass at Baitsbite. Here and there upon the bank his rivals walked no more confidently. Even the oldest of them, as his coach observed, was a little "white about the gills," and many a novice trembled when the second gun was fired. There were three minutes yet until the

great race began. Romer stripped off his sweater with clumsy hands; he could hear his heart beating when the boat was pushed a little way from the bank.

"I'm a fool to-night," he told himself for consolation. "I wish to Heaven they'd start; it would be all right then."

Boatman Tom, catching "seven's" rigger with his boat-hook, pushed their light and buoyant craft a little way out into the stream and added his instructions to the coach's.

"Right off the stretcher, gentlemen, and mind you pick it up," he said in a voice like a giant's whisper. "You'll catch 'em right enough; don't you mind about that. You jest think of getting your 'ands away!"

But the coach said: "There's the gun! Touch her, two, and get forward all!"

The men came forward on their slides, and sat like statues on the still waters. All along the bank the coaches were crying instructions to their crews and giving them the final word of praise or blame. By here and there you would hear a man crying, "Twenty seconds gone!" or again, "Thirty seconds gone!" Presently, when but five seconds were left, a whole babel of voices arose, shouting "Five — four — three — two — one!" The gun boomed heavily. More than a hundred oars were dipped into the water as one. The boats were off!

From the moment of starting, Romer was unconscious of bank or people, or anything but the task before him. His eyes were fixed upon "seven's" back. The rhythm of the eight oars, rising and falling as one, was the best music he could hear. He felt the light ship springing beneath him; from the towing-path came a hum as of distant voices. He thought that he had never rowed so well—and yet, presently, above the clamour and the din, he heard his coach's voice, and he knew that the words were addressed to him. "On to it, five—get on to it, man! What's the matter, five? Swing out, I say; get your hands away!"

Many voices took up the cry, and Romer's heart sank as it was repeated. He was flagging, then! Those on the bank could detect it. And his crew was not gaining on Hall. He listened in vain for the rattle or the clanging bell which should tell him that the distance between the boats had been decreased; but no signals were made. He heard only this tumult of voices crying, "Get on to it, five!" And they were approaching Ditton by this time—were about to pass before that dazzling gallery, where so many critical eyes would applaud or decry their efforts. Romer, calling upon all his pluck, swore that Caius should win. And yet Caius was not winning, but losing at every stroke—palpably losing!

They rounded Ditton Corner, slowing down and swinging out for the purpose ; and once in the Long Reach, even the optimists began to feel that Hall had escaped them that night. There were still the old cries, " Get on to it, five ! " but they were repeated more in sorrow than in hope. Anon, however, a loud, clear voice was added to the number, and it rang out over the river like a clarion call. " Buck up, five ! buck up, old chap ! " A parrot cry for an oarsman to hear, yet amazing for its achievement. On the bank they said that the words were magical. A man, riding a good horse on the Ditton side, had waited for the Caius boat, and now cantered with it towards the railway bridge. He wore a dark check suit and a bowler hat, and was inconspicuous in the flannel-coated throng. But at the very first word Romer knew the voice, and in the very joy of hearing it his strength came back as upon a freshet.

" It's Dudley ! " he gasped ; " it's Dudley, by all the gods ! "

The crowd had a new excitement from this time onwards. Those voices roaring " Buck up, five ! " changed from their doleful complaint to a sudden cry which in itself was the expression of a triumph. They were bawling, " Well rowed, five ! " before the ditch was passed ; the rattles were sprung, the bells were clanging, and Caius gained on Hall at

every stroke. Those that ran on ahead in blazers of black and white gave place to others who came surging up breathlessly in blazers of blue and black. The partisans of Hall and Caius, friends and enemies, were intermingled upon the towing-path. A breathless, excited cavalcade swept under the railway bridge and went gasping on towards the winning-post. And there are not two feet between the boats now! Aye, hear that final *crescendo*, that thunderous shout as the Caius flag is loosed suddenly upon its staff and floats proudly on the June breeze; hear the deafening applause which goes up for long minutes together. "Well rowed, Caius!" "Well rowed, old Bous!" A hundred times, "Well rowed!"

Romer, bent double in the boat, and scarcely able to see the banks, had yet the strength to slap Percy at six upon the back and to shout—

"It was Dudley's race—I heard him at Ditton!"

CHAPTER XV

FACE TO FACE

DUDLEY HATTON arrived in Cambridge almost at the moment when the inseparable "three" set out for the river. He drove to Caius; and finding Romer had left his rooms, returned to the "Bull" hotel and ordered a horse. Sixteen years had passed since he took a poll degree at Caius, and was spoken of by his tutors as a man who apologized for little Latin by a minimum of execrable Greek. A very great deal had happened since that day; old ideals were forgotten, old habits changed, but the athletic prejudice prevailed. Dudley had rowed in the Caius first boat in his third year; and however busy he might be, or whatever his occupations, news of successes won by his old college never failed to interest him. A member of the Leander Club, he visited Henley annually and so kept in touch with the reigning generation of oarsmen. Romer's appearance in the Caius boat added a new interest. As to most athletes, mere success in the schools seemed to him of secondary interest;

while he hoped that Romer would get a good degree, he would have much preferred a rowing " blue " for him. The boy's future, after all, was more or less assured. Dudley had the vaguest idea as to the precise value of a rowing " blue " in the commercial affairs of Hatton and Hatton ; but as he did not see that the classics would be a more valuable asset, he preferred the active qualification. He had come to Cambridge, it may be, because of his promise to little Beryl. If there were another reason, it was one he would have confessed to no man. The mysterious letter addressed to him in London remained a greater mystery than ever. He had spared no effort to identify the sender of it, but had failed. The photograph itself, that bewildering picture of the dead who was alive, remained as inscrutable as when first he had looked upon it. He did not know, could not imagine, the purpose of such a message. Was it the wish, then, of the subject of the picture that he should know of her existence ? or had a friend sent it, believing that the living might even yet stand for the dead ? He could not tell. Nevertheless, his curiosity was masterful. He felt from the first that he must know the truth, the whole of it. If he searched all Europe to find her, he must discover the woman whose face could thus bewitch him.

This matter was much in his mind when he set

out for Cambridge ; but the familiar scenes, powerful still to recreate forgotten days, permitted him for the moment to escape it ; and when they brought his horse to the hotel and he rode away to the river, it seemed to him that the greatest gift which life could give would be the obliteration of the years which had intervened and the rebirth of that youth he had left behind in Cambridge. Though sixteen years had passed since he was an undergraduate, every stone in the old colleges was familiar to him. He could remember with what pride he had first put on cap and gown and gone timidly to dine in Hall ; how this great society of scholars had impressed him and led him to great resolutions. The spirit of the living and the dead age of scholarship seemed to breathe upon it all. For the time being, at least, it was to him the centre of the universe. Here, he thought, a man might conceive the finest of all ambitions, the ambition of knowledge and the power of wisdom. His father had been one of the cleverest barristers of his time and had given his son a generous allowance. Dudley recalled his own pet schemes at that time—how he had wished to follow his father's profession and to win its chief prizes. He recalled the mental steps by which he had departed from an idea so stereotyped. The law and its subtleties wearied him. A clever invention, rejected by the English War Office, but

accepted by Continental powers, established his fortune. He was one of the first to speculate in South African mines; and so the great hoard of wealth had been stored up—in sixteen years! He could not believe it sometimes; the reality was inconceivable.

These were his thoughts while he rode to the river; but the first sight of the merry Cam turned the course of them, and he became the oarsman from that moment. Ditton itself, with its blaze of garish colour, appealed to him less than the bare towing-path, with the men in shorts and blazers, and the graceful, light ships moored to the grassy bank. From the first he looked for the Caius boat; but a loquacious undergraduate informed him that it had already gone down to the starting-point; and it was not until the crews, with their yelling satellites, came racing by that he espied Romer's huge form and encouraged his waning efforts with a clarion call. The race, to be sure, quickened his pulse as few contests could have done. He was keen as any lad when the crews came up. His was the loudest voice in that cantering company of horsemen which raced from Ditton to the ditch, and would have raced on but for the water forbidding them.

"Now then, five—buck up, old chap; five—buck up!"

His vocal strength surprised him no less than the result of it. A bushman's cry learned in Australia startled even the runners and silenced their horns. "Whir-oo-oo-oo!" it went. You heard it almost at Chesterton. From that point he almost counted the strokes while the Caius boat gained inch by inch upon the flagging ship before them. It was a bump—it was not—they would do it—they would be done! He had no voice left at the end of the gallop, and he nearly killed an ancient Don when he reined in his horse.

"A near thing!" he said, laughing; "they'll do it yet if they stick to it! I hope I have not hurt you, sir?"

The elderly clergyman picked up a little straw hat and put it on an exceedingly bald head. He was quite out of breath, and it was wonderful how such poor little legs had carried him from Ditton almost to the ditch. He answered Dudley very nervously—ashamed, perhaps, of his own display.

"Really it was nothing. I am always glad to see Queens' do well." And then he asked, as though a little doubtful of it: "It was Queens', was it not?"

Dudley restrained a smile as he turned his horse about and began to walk by the old parson's side back to Ditton and the emptying gallery of colour.

"I fear you made a little mistake," he said kindly; "that was Caius; and by the way they're yelling, I should say it was a bump! Queens' are down yonder—I do not think they're doing very well."

He would not tell such an enthusiast that Queens' were bumped; and the parson, given to apologies, made excuses for his failing eyesight.

"My sight is not very strong," he said. "I am much obliged to you. It does me good to run with the boats, although I can never see them. You know what Terence says, '*Ut quisque suum vult esse, ita est.*' These things make children of us all."

"You rowed yourself once?" suggested Dudley, whose sympathies were quickly won by the veteran's pluck. "I suppose it was before my time?" he added.

"I rowed in the Trinity boat," answered the old man a little sadly, "just two-and-forty years ago. Two-and-forty years!—the life of fourteen generations of undergraduates! And Cambridge is as dear to me now as she was then. I love every stone of her splendid walls! And you," he exclaimed, remembering that he spoke to a stranger —"you, I suppose, were an athlete, too?"

"Yes," said Dudley; "I rowed in my time. It's only sixteen years ago, but it seems to me a life-

time. It's when the young ones begin to cut us out that we realize how old we are! I have a nephew rowing for Caius; that's why I am up here to-day."

The parson, holding the stirrup-leather to help him on his way, seemed pleased to have some one to talk to.

"These young people make life very pleasant for us," he said. "I have none of my sons at Cambridge now; but my granddaughter is staying with me at Queens'. *Novi ingenium mulierum.* But we used to be very grateful to them in the May week. You, I suppose, are staying in Cambridge for the frivolities?"

"I am staying as long as the vagaries of the Stock Exchange will let me. This is a time when a man abhors civilization. If there were no telegraphs, I should at least be safe for four-and-twenty hours. As it is, the next train may take me back to London."

The old man shook his head wonderingly.

"I do not think I have received a dozen telegrams in the whole course of my life," he said. "I never see one without a certain shock. These new customs are difficult to adopt. Daphne, my granddaughter, says that letters are always answered nowadays by telegrams; but I prefer the old-fashioned ways."

"Your granddaughter," said Dudley, "is evidently a victim of the times. And if you will permit me to say so, I think she is waiting for you over there. I see a young lady who is evidently anxious about you."

A girl had crossed from the gallery at Ditton and was now advancing up the towing-path as though seeking some one she had lost. When she observed Dudley with the old clergyman, she stood and waited for them to come up. Dudley did not clearly see her face at the first, and would have ridden away without seeing her at all, perhaps, but for his new friend's entreaty.

"If you are ever in Queens'," said the old man, "I can show you some manuscripts which may interest you. My name is Bell—Norton Bell, and I am senior Fellow."

The confidence invited some return of it. Dudley hastened to introduce himself.

"I am Dudley Hatton," he said bluntly; "perhaps you may have heard of me. My nephew, Romer, has been three years at Caius."

The parson shook his head. Such was fame. He knew nothing of the modern millionaire.

"This is my granddaughter, Daphne," he said. "I hope we shall all meet again before you go to London."

Dudley looked up and beheld the girl face to

face. And in that instant it seemed to him that the dead had come to life.

* * * * *

Daphne did not observe his embarrassment, but half remembering his name, and believing his face to be familiar to her, she held out her hand impulsively and confessed her impressions.

"Oh! I'm sure—I'm quite sure, Mr. Hatton, that you and I have met before!" she said.

He had sat until this moment like one spell-bound before the living dead; but he recovered himself by a supreme effort, and taking the outstretched hand, he held it while he said hoarsely—

"Yes, we have met before—you and I!"

BOOK III

THE DARKNESS

CHAPTER XVI

AT SONNING COURT

IT wanted an hour yet to the beginning of the water-carnival; but Beryl Garth was already down and at the stairhead waiting to see the guests come in. Five minutes ago the housekeeper had told her that she was a "picture"; but she was not greatly interested in her own appearance, and when she stood at the head of the great oak staircase of Sonning Court, she questioned all she met, the maids flitting from room to room, and the footmen hurrying to and fro with their burden of plate and glasses, as to the precise hour and circumstance of her friend Romer's arrival. Their inability to help her and their obvious haste to be about their business excited Beryl's just anger. What was the

good of this big house, and all the fine rooms, and all the people, if Romer were not there? She had so much to tell him; she was bursting with news.

"They're all silly to-night; and it's eating again," she reflected wisely; "you never can be 'good form' unless you stuff. I'd sooner be—yes, I'd sooner be a duck——"

Her finished comparison happily remained unspoken. The sudden appearance of friend Romer, flannel-clad and noisy, in the hall below, cut short her simile and sent her bounding down to him like an antelope. Beryl was one who could not conceal either her love or her hate. She had claimed Romer for her confidences from the very first.

"I said it—I said you'd do it—and it's done—and you're here—oh! I'm so glad—glad—glad!" she cried all in a breath. Romer was accustomed to these greetings by this time. He took Beryl by both her hands and kissed her.

"I've come through from Harwich this morning—beastly train and jolly hot. Is Percy here?—seems to be a decent sort of log cabin we've struck upon, Beryl. I suppose Uncle Dudley's upstairs?"

Beryl put her fingers to her lips and indulged in other mysterious gestures, all implying a pressing need of secrecy.

"They're all here—heaps of them. Mr. Elling-

ham came last night, and he's fun! And she's upstairs, Romer, she's really upstairs, and her father."

"What! Miss Bell and old Norton?"

"Yes; he came this morning, and I took him out in a boat, and we were nearly drownded. It's that horrid weir again, and I wish they'd take it away. The boat will go over there; and he couldn't row, you know, and when I asked him if he could swim, he said: 'Great Heaven! my dear, has it come to that?' Then I got a boat-hook and grabbed the bank, and Jacob, the gardener, came tearing along, and I said, 'Leap,' and he did it; but it wasn't far enough, and all his legs got wet. The stupid! as if he couldn't have loped as I told him!"

Beryl's past participles were always a trouble to her, especially in exciting moments when she had a great tale to tell. Her solitary childhood had left her at fifteen an attractive medley of infancy and womanhood, so that she would talk almost like a baby at one moment, and with a woman's wit the next. Romer never quite knew which mood was the more winning. He enjoyed them both.

"Good thing you didn't drown the old chap, Beryl," he said, when she made an end of it for want of breath; "we should have had a funeral then, instead of a wedding."

Beryl opened her eyes very wide and clasped her hands in an expressive gesture.

"Now, do you—do you really think it will be a wedding, Romer?"

"I—why, I haven't thought much about it. But if it isn't to be, why's Uncle Dudley taken this house, and why are we all at Sonning when we ought to be in Switzerland or in his yacht? He doesn't ask an old bundle of Greek manuscripts like Norton Bell for nothing, you be sure of that! Don't you say I told you, Beryl; don't you say anything about it to any one."

Beryl was wise enough for that. She knew nothing, certainly, of the customs which Romer mentioned so glibly, nor was she any authority upon the claims of the mountains or the sea; but the sudden change in her patron's mode of life was too startling not to set such a little wisehead thinking, and thinking she had been during many an hour of that sunny month. To Beryl it was all unreality still—the old life remained so unforgotten that the new must be her fairy story. London had dazed her; but Sonning Court, that immense brick house by the riverside, was her enduring wonder. It could not be, she argued, that such a place was hers for a home henceforth. Her father would send for her before many days were passed, and all this splendour, this magnificence would vanish as

the mists. Beryl used to look at the clock sometimes and say: "He will come before it strikes again." She never asked if it were well or ill with Rhoderick Garth. By years of neglect had he earned this indifference.

Dudley had taken Sonning Court shortly after his return from Cambridge. The June week, with its dances, its dinners, its flower shows and its *fêtes*, was for him some new pleasure come suddenly into a flagging life. Not even in his undergraduate days had frivolity meant so much to him or the pursuit of frivolity been so earnest. This, be it said, was but the measure of his excuse, for upon the day that Daphne and her father quitted their house in Queens' College for a farmyard in Kent, upon that day Dudley took the first train from Cambridge to return to his home and his affairs. Thereafter, so much of the world as knew him said that he was like a man risen from the dead. Rumour, upon the wings of Chagrin and Malice, noised the thing abroad and made much of it. Dudley Hatton, it said, had resumed control of his great undertakings, and had brought more than the old genius to the development of them. His successes surprised London. They surprised none more than those who had profited so largely by his withdrawal. This man, rich as the fables of wealth, was adding daily to his store. Difficulties which

would have crushed the less gifted and resolute were but opportunites for him. His broken health was restored tenfold. In spirit, in activity, in almost boyish zest of his new possession, he was different from the Dudley even of the old victories. His friends rejoiced exceedingly; his enemies feared him. The women said: "He will marry again"—they had but a woman's reason for saying it.

This man, ransomed by a woman's face from the grip of neurasthenia and its consequences, laboured steadily at his business during the months of July and August, and astonished the world of tongues by taking Sonning Court for the summer—that "baronial hall," as the auctioneers call it, which lies but a mile above Shiplake Lock and is one of the show-houses of the sorely tried Thames. Here he spent the "week ends" and the evenings of the days. Hither came Beryl in the last week of July, and here assembled the guests for that water-carnival with which Dudley would celebrate Daphne's arrival at the house. He had taken it that she might visit it—for no other reason. Were the whole truth told, it would be this—that he had counted the days until her father could bring her to Sonning. And now she was come at last—she was upstairs dressing. Beryl told Romer as much while they went up the staircase together.

"She's in the Tower Room, and she's doing her hair, for I heard her drop the comb. Isn't she lovely, Romer? Don't you think she's perfectly lovely?"

Romer had not thought much about it. He was particularly anxious at the moment to know that his dressing-case was going to the right room, and that his kit-bag had not been pitched out at Slough.

"I got out of the train to see—well, to see the papers, and there was an old parson went off with a bag just like mine. I never thought of it until just this minute, Beryl, but if I've got his kit, you'll find me in a cassock and bands. By Jove! that would be a new idea! Cassock and bands and a water-fête!"

"We're to have the bands, anyhow," said Beryl, but half understanding it. "A man came about an hour ago with a long thing you make noises through, and he's gone upstairs to practise. I suppose he doesn't want any one to hear him. And Romer, there's to be—yes, real boats and lanterns, and we're to go on the water—all except Mr. Bell, who went and got into it; and we're to eat lots; and after that, it's dancing. Do dance with me, Romer—you will, won't you? Last time you said you would, and then you bunked! I thought it horrid of you——"

At any other time Romer would have stopped to tell Beryl that "bunked" was scarcely His Majesty's English; but the guests were appearing now from many rooms, and carriages were to be heard on the drive of the park, and footmen bustled more than ever; and through the half-open door of the dining-room you saw the great table, and the candles already lighted, and other preparations for that which was nominally a supper, but in reality an excellent dinner; so Romer disappeared into his room, while Beryl waited a moment; and as she waited, some one gripped her suddenly by the arms and kissed her very gently. She knew that it was Dudley and turned impulsively; she clung quite close to him and told him her trouble.

"I never—never can go down amongst all those people," she said, measuring every word of it. He answered her, linking his arm with hers and leading her towards the hall—

"Nonsense!" he said. "Do you think they will eat you, Sunshine? Not a bit of it—not while there are plover's eggs and asparagus. Come down with me; and if you're frightened, you can get into my pocket."

Beryl knew Dudley in many moods, but not in this. Romer, she said, in his most frivolous mood was not more light-hearted. Everything she said or did pleased him. He scanned the preparations

for the feast with an eye become critical of trifles; and he could not hide it from her that a vague excitement compelled this unusual activity. "It must be Daphne," she thought; "of course it is Daphne."

"I'll come with you for a bit," she said in her matter-of-fact way; "but I know you won't want me for long. It's going to be different now, isn't it? You won't want me when Daphne comes down."

She did not pout or assume that wounded air right and proper for such an occasion, but just spoke from her heart. "It would be different." Beryl was quite wise enough to see that, and Dudley was too honest to contradict her.

"Yes, Sunshine," he said, "it will be different; but not for you—no, not for you."

Beryl said nothing, but she fell to wondering, while she followed him through the great rooms, if, in years to come, she would be able, as Daphne had done, to bring a man from the darkness to the light. She did not think that she would; but she envied, none the less, the gifts which could bestow happiness so unmistakable.

* * * * *

Daphne dressed in the Tower Room, much troubled by a persistent maid. Whatever services

a trim domestic of her own household rendered her, these never went to ransacking her travelling-bag or commenting upon those necessaries of civilization which she had left behind. For the most part of the year she lived with an uncle in Kensington, and his idea of domestic happiness was expressed in the phrase, "Honest roast beef on good British china!" She had lost both her parents when she was ten years old, and, while she had never known real poverty, nevertheless a good middle-class economy had attended her education and the subsequent years. She was sensible enough to make no complaint of it; and while she had a small income in her own right, she recognized her indebtedness to relatives upon whom she had no real claim. It is to be doubted, indeed, if Daphne ever took much account of her surroundings. She was, as her uncle told her, the oddest mixture of the practical and the ideal he had ever come across. Willing to humour both his eccentricities and her grandfather's, her real life was spent in a world apart from them—a dream-world of her own creating. She did not covet riches—far from it; a strain of some Celtic romance, inherited and ineradicable, enacted for her a hundred dramas of which she was the heroine. She would sleep to dream of moated castles and pursuing knights. Waking, she would imagine herself the mistress of

the arts, the mistress of the theatre—now a great singer, now a great actress—the recipient of profound homage and the object of the people's plaudits. The same untrained imagination wrote for her a young girl's creed of love. Some day, she said, out of the unknown the man would come and end the monotony of the suburban life. She felt she was born to some great position and ultimately would win it. And yet, with all this, her girlhood lost none of its attractiveness. She was sympathetic to the last degree ; had a woman's tenderness for those who suffered, a woman's unselfishness and winning gentleness. With vanity, as the word is commonly understood, none might charge her. It is to be doubted if she knew that she was beautiful ; but she never ceased to tell herself that some great event would change the course of her life ; and when it was so changed, she accepted the day as a matter of course.

Daphne did not like the maid fussing about her ; perhaps the size of the room at Sonning Court somewhat awed her ; but she dressed, nevertheless, with a matter-of-fact routine, and acted the part as though she had been born to it.

" I came away in a great hurry. My servant, I fear, has packed very badly. Indeed, I think Mr. Hatton intended this quite as a surprise party, did he not ? " she asked the maid, while she put on

a dress which Beryl afterwards declared was the "most sweetest" thing she had ever seen. The servant, however, understanding the situation perfectly, and being quite used to this kind of story, would not hear of apologies.

"And I don't wonder, miss," was her brisk reply. "What with the silver they put in the bags nowadays, and all the silly things that nobody ever wants, really I am surprised that ladies can travel at all. Will you have the white gloves or the pink? and shall I borrow the tongs from downstairs?"

Daphne said that she would have the white gloves, and she had no need of the tongs. Her hair, indeed, was Nature's dower; it covered her like a veil when she let it down, and she invariably lost her temper when trying to put it up. She was anxious to-night to look her best, and yet found herself unable to make the effort. The immense house, with all its suggestion of wealth and tradition, the maid watching her, warred upon her natural energy and stifled it. The prying eyes of the girl seemed to follow her wherever she turned. And Daphne was always conscious of that great event which must happen presently. The master of the house, she said, would ask her to be his wife. His wealth would become her wealth; the home which now awed her would, in its turn, acknowledge her. A

vista of a splendid future opened to her eyes and kept her dreaming. She would have been very late for dinner but for her grandfather's knock and the old fellow's timid request that she would tie a bow for him.

"My poor old fingers never can do it, Daphne," he said apologetically; "and, really, I am frightened to trouble the gentleman—ahem!—who brings me my hot water."

Daphne took the bow in her nimble fingers and tied it cunningly. She dusted the old gentleman's collar and turned it down lovingly. The pin which should keep the tie from climbing up the back of his head was pressed to-night with trembling fingers. Even the old Don perceived her agitation and spoke to her with some kindness.

"You are really very, very beautiful, Daphne!" he said.

She kissed him very gratefully and went back to have one more look in the glass. The maid had left them at this time and they were alone.

"Can you believe it, Daddy?" (she always called him that); "can you believe it's all real?"

The old gentleman was no dreamer—besides, he had been in the river that morning.

"It is certainly very surprising," he confessed; "and I hope I shall take no hurt from it." And then, as though he realized what Daphne meant,

he said, taking her hand in his: "I shall be all alone, my dear—all alone now!"

She answered him with one of those wayward gestures always irresistible and not to be answered.

"You couldn't be pathetic if you tried, Daddy!" she said with a laugh. "You know you like it! Why, think what a dinner you and the books will have together!"

He shook his head in protest; and they went down the great corridor together. At the stairhead, Daphne, seeing all the people in the hall below, the lights, the jewels, the flowers, hearing the buzz of talk and the dreamy music of a string band on the lawn without, stopped suddenly and spoke her thoughts half aloud—

"If I thought that I were here because he is rich," she said, "I would go away this minute! But oh! isn't it—isn't it splendid, Daddy?"

The old scholar assented with a word and quickened his step. He could see the 'sixty-three port among the silver on the buffet. His goal was there.

* * * * *

There were hundreds of lanterns hung in the gardens of Sonning Court, and a row of them at the river's edge where the boats were moored. The darkness of the night helped the bewitching picture of house and river, and the wood beyond it, framed

in this ribbon of dazzling lights. Belated voyagers from Henley or Caversham eased their launches or rested their oars to gaze a moment at that starry scene. They obtained glimpses of laughing women and active men ; of honest fiddlers from Kensington pretending to be Hungarians, of open windows through which the lights, the silver, the wreck of the feast might be observed—these and the woodlands behind, where lanterns swung from many a tree and the leaves trembled in the dazzling radiance. Upon the lawn itself, that process of selection which is Nature's law set many a heart a-fluttering, left many a dowager with the refreshment-tent for her consolation. It was the survival of the fittest, Dudley said ; even ping-pong stood at a discount. Bridge had no charm, nor could the Reverend Norton obtain his beloved "rubber." All the world was for the water and the carnival of oars. Women grown old in discretion went to the boats under protest ; young girls led the way unblushingly. It was delightful to see that cunning of youth which pointed out the frailty of outriggers, and, having frightened the oldest ladies, rowed away with the youngest. Soon the whole breadth of the river echoed a note of music and of laughter. Lanterns went dancing from island to island above Shiplake—other lanterns went out and were not rekindled. You heard the tongue of satire and

the cynic; but not the tongue of love, for the wind did not whisper a sigh more gentle. And were there not the secret places of the woods, the lonely backwaters, the unlighted thickets for the practice of the oldest art—the lover's art? The wise ones, indeed, slunk away ashore. They were rarely alone.

Dudley was one of those; and making neither excuse nor apology, he led Daphne away to a remote arbour in the grounds which even the gnomes with the refreshments had forgotten. There was no light here, nor could he see her bright eyes or the flush upon her face. He walked and talked with her for a little while as with any guest that Sonning might harbour.

"Yes," he said, speaking of the house, "it is an old place, but not too old. I like old houses; but not to live in. If a man is accustomed to modern civilization, he is not sorry that Henry the Eighth is dead. They told me that Sonning was a Tudor house, possibly because it was built in Queen Anne's reign. In Henry's day they kept a bedroom for the King—who called twice a year to rob them and put every one else in attics. There is no King's bedroom at Sonning; but you have the Queen's —at least, they call it so in the catalogue."

Daphne liked the compliment, but did not immediately answer it. A sense of great intimacy,

of chosen friendship with him had been hers from the first moment of their introduction. She experienced it again to-night. It was just as though one had come into her life to whom she might tell everything—confess her whole story, even those things of which no living being had ever heard. She knew that she must go to him if he asked her; it was her destiny.

"I have never had the chance to live in big houses," she said frankly. "My uncle's house in London has eight windows and a door, and that's all you can say about it. At Cambridge I like the old college rooms because one seems so much alone in them. All the world doesn't stare in through your windows; and then the gardens are so lovely. That's why, if I were rich, I think I should like old houses; just to open one's window in the morning and to breathe the scent of the jessamine and the mignonette; all the dear old trees, too—the laburnum, and the may, and the hawthorn. One lives then—one lives a whole life on a summer's morning!"

She stood a moment upon the path as though realizing a joy of summer which imagination only could recall for her. Perhaps she was a little afraid of her own frankness; but Dudley understood her so well that she did not regret it.

"I hope that you will find such days at Sonning," he said gently. "They are rare days, I fear, even

for those of us who are the happiest. I suppose we live in the expectation that they will come back. It is absurd to speak of things as though any of us could enjoy a greater measure of realization than expectation. We live for the splendid hours; but they are very few."

She knew that he was speaking of his own case, the whispered story of which had come to her. Another, at her age, might have complained, perhaps, of a lover whose outlook was thus clouded by the gospel of regret; but her vanity was satisfied that it should be so; "For," she said, "I can change it." This, from the first, had been her idea—to give happiness for the love that she would win.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed sincerely, "we imagine most of our pleasures; but they are not any the less pleasures because we imagine them. I do not think any of us would care to go on living if it were not for imagination. They tell me that I'm the most romantic creature alive, and I know it is true. It is foolish, perhaps; but not more foolish than regret. Sometimes I think I am a great singer, and you know I can't sing a note! When I am tired of that, I become a great painter. Why shouldn't I? If I really were a great singer, I should have all sorts of bothers. There would be rivals to hate, managers who would not engage me, parts which would be horrid. If you imagine it all, you don't have any-

thing of the kind; your voice is always splendid, people hiss your rivals off the stage, you get—oh! fabulous salaries: and it isn't hard work at all, as it would be if it were true. That's just the beauty of it. You hurt no one by imagination; but it makes you happy—now, doesn't it?"

Dudley smiled at the exuberance of her confession. Years ago he, too, had been a visionary; but the realization surpassed his dream, and here, in his thirty-ninth year, he could remember how pitiful his ambitions had been—how immeasurably below reality. This girlish philosopher was wiser in her generation; he devoutly hoped that the truth would be kinder to her than it had been to him.

"The world would be happier if we were all as easily contented," he said reflectively. "Each has his idea and strives for it. You have one, I am sure. An imagination does not destroy it. Won't you tell me all about it, Daphne?"

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name; but it was done so naturally, and as though by right, of something deeper than mere friendship, that she passed it by and went on as though it had been unsaid.

"I suppose I have, but I don't think I could tell you," she said quickly. "I am too changeable to have any great purpose, as my uncle calls it. The real truth is that I am afraid I am vain. I want

some one to minister to my vanity—and no one ever does. That's what makes me a person with a grievance."

Dudley did not answer her at once, but, taking a coloured lantern from one of the trees, he led the way through the thicket until they came to an arbour which looks out over Sonning Weir; and there, drawing a wicker chair close to hers, he sat beside her. For a little while they watched the distant hills, flitting like glow-worms over the still water, and listened to the plaintive music of fiddles to which the woods gave their harmonies.

"You and I are very much alike, Daphne," he said at last. "Our vanity hurts no one, but it helps us. You have all your life before you, but mine is half lived. I had many ideas when I was your age, but most of them are broken images now. There is one left—one only. I want to speak to you about that."

He closed his hand about hers and bent down low so that his lips almost touched her silky hair. Her heart was beating quickly, and she knew that all the blood had gone leaping to her face. The hand that touched her own was hot and nervous. She understood that this was one of those hours for which she had lived. That low, musical voice bewitched her. She had imagined this scene many a time; but how different it was! No lover's passionate declaration

carried her away by the very stress of its pleading; there were no vows, no protests, no childish appeals to her affection. She heard but this—the story of a man's life and of his need.

"Shall I speak to you about myself, Daphne?" he asked. "Shall I tell you something about my own life?"

She said: "Yes, yes! please do!" in a voice that was scarce more than a whisper. And he went on.

"I knew you would like to hear it. From the very first moment that I saw you, I said: 'Here is one who must know!' It was not strange that I should say it. They have told you why it should not be?"

She answered without evasion.

"Yes; I think they have told me."

"That you are very like my dead wife?"

"Yes, yes——"

"And yet so different."

He pressed his hands to his forehead, and for a spell he wrestled with memory. One page in his history he dared not recount even to her who had the best right to know it. That page he strove to shut from his recollection now. To-night would obliterate it for ever.

"Yes, so different, Daphne—so different. I could never speak to Hermione as I speak to you.

It was just as though something intervened all the time, as though some one said : ' She's not listening, she does not care.' And I tried to speak so many times; I tried to tell her why success did not make me happy. I wanted her to know what lay behind it all, my need—yes, almost my salvation. She did not mean to wound me ; she was not unkind naturally, I think. But she never understood me. You cannot love if you do not understand. I have just been asking all my life that some one woman might love me. I am asking it now, Daphne—now ! "

She trembled at his touch, and finding his arm about her, she laid her burning cheek upon his own.

" And should I—should I understand, Dudley ? "

" You understood from the first," he said. " I knew it at Cambridge—I know it now. We two have been seeking each other through the years, Daphne, but to-night I have found you ! Thank God, I have found you ! "

* * * * *

They returned to the house at midnight. The masqueraders had come in from the river and were dancing in the hall. Beryl, discovering Dudley at once, ran up to question him.

" Where have you been ? " she cried dictatorially. But then observing Daphne, her voice sank to a

whisper, and as she raised herself on tiptoe she said: "Oh! I am so glad—so glad it's different!"

* * * * *

At the same hour the valet Courvoisier, packing his bag in hot haste, left Sonning by the morning mail and said that he quitted Dudley Hatton's service for ever.

CHAPTER XVII

A MESSAGE OF RUBIES

DUDLEY was going to town next morning, and old Norton Bell, having an appointment with a bookseller, and a distinct aversion from rivers, said that he would take advantage of the reserved carriage and accompany him. The disappearance of the valet Courvoisier had stirred the curiosity of the household to its depths; and a letter from that faithful fellow, in which he said that he had been suddenly called away on a domestic affair of great urgency, satisfied no one. Dudley was not less perplexed than the servants'-hall. He associated Courvoisier's flight—he knew not why—with the brougham he had seen in Charles Street and the empty house to which it had carried his valet. "The man has been making a fool of himself, and I must stand by him," he said. He had other reasons for going to London; but of these he would speak to no one. There were jewels in the safe at Park Lane whose existence he had almost forgotten.

Some of them he had bought merely as the collector will buy any pretty thing ; others had been his gifts to Hermione. He hoped that he could find a dower of the former for Daphne ; the latter he was determined to sell.

It is not possible to describe with what a changed spirit and giant hope the master of Sonning set out to London. The night had given him all. That for which he had craved in the long years of work and success—the love in which alone the past might be forgotten, the gentleness, the sympathy, the gift of true womanhood—was his to-day. Never had the sun shone so brightly upon his own gardens that summer morning ; never were the woods so green, the air so sweet, the world so fair. Every whisper of the wind said " Daphne ! " her name was written on sky and water—" Daphne, Daphne ! " She had come to him at last, and a new heaven and a new earth were created at her touch. His love, he said, was not as other men's—a passion, a desire ; it was the love of one who gave him the right to live ; the love of one in whose gentle heart all sorrow should be buried.

He drove to the station in his motor-car, taking many risks and breaking the law with a delight which was boyish. The old Don at his side remembered forgotten prayers and expostulated with heathen gods. He was two generations behind

motor-cars, and, after all, the Greeks got on very well without them. In the train he mopped his brow and declared his lack of courage.

"It is perfectly astonishing," he said, "perfectly astonishing! You will not think me very old-fashioned if I say that my nerves are—hem!—a little too classical for this kind of thing."

Dudley, arranging their bags in the carriage reserved for them, expressed great contrition for his reckless driving.

"It is just idiots like myself," he said, "who injure the industry and cripple it. I ought to be fined ten pounds, and perhaps I shall be. It was really wicked to bring you along so fast. I am altogether irresponsible this morning, and I hope the police made a note of it."

It was quite true, he ought to have been fined ten pounds; but the old parson thought that he understood the circumstance, and having been a lover himself in the past which seemed so remote that even the year was forgotten, he hastened to be agreeable.

"Man is always angry with himself because Nature has only given him legs," he said didactically; "he wants wings, wheels—he would like to be a cannon-shot. Daedalus tried to fly, you remember, and Icarus was killed. He was the guest in the motor-car."

And then, remembering his flight through space, he exclaimed—

"Tell me, now, how fast do you think we went this morning? Was it twenty miles an hour—or even more?"

Dudley, much amused, flung himself into a seat, and taking out a cigar-case, he offered the old man a consoling cigar.

"Twenty miles an hour? More likely fifty! It is wiser not to ask how fast a man goes when he has a train to catch."

The old gentleman opened his eyes very wide in astonishment.

"Fifty miles an hour! Bless my soul!"—he determined already to make it seventy over the college port at Queens'.

"We have to go fast nowadays to live," Dudley went on. "Men do everything in a hurry; they even make love in a hurry. It's only marriage that goes a little more slowly. We marry at leisure and repent in haste. I am the exception, Mr. Bell. I am going to marry in haste, and I shall never repent at all!"

He was glad of this opportunity for a formal interview with Daphne's grandfather. Such a simple old man would deal with the affair in the simplest manner; but Dudley's business habit compelled him to think of meaner aspects.

"I am glad you came with me," he said, "for, of course, I wanted to talk to you about Daphne. With your consent—I believe you are her guardian—I propose that we avoid the customary formalities and arrange the whole thing, if you like, with indecent haste. The settlements are really matters for the lawyers; but I don't think we need worry about those rogues. I am a rich man, as you know, and where Daphne is concerned my fortune is hers. But I shall begin with a settlement; and it is for you to say if you think it is a just one. It occurs to me that an express train is just the place for such a chat."

He gave the poor old parson not a ghost of a chance either to assent or to differ, but raced on from point to point in that fresh field of a roseate vision, whither love had led him by the hand, and all his wish was a young girl's pleasure. Ah! the things he would do for Daphne presently; the wedding journey they would make together; the cities they would visit; the joy they would garner. There was nothing in the world too good for one who had changed his life in a day and would hold it changed for all time. She must have houses, horses, jewels—she must reign in London, be the mistress of his home and his wealth, fulfil to the last line those pages of her dreams which were now become reality. In vain Daphne's grandfather put in his

"Dear me's!" and his "Well, well's!" Dudley went on like a steam engine. The old gentleman's glasses were at the very summit of his antique forehead before the lover had half done with it. They were at Paddington when he began to understand the splendid proposition which had been made to him.

"Five thousand pounds a year—to be settled on my Daphne! And I have but four hundred pounds," he said to himself, with just a suspicion of a jealous thought; "it's fabulous, positively fabulous. What will she do with it? I must tell her uncle this very day—and how her relations will plague her! *Vade retro*—we live in an age of miracles. Five thousand pounds—five——"

He could not grasp it. That a mere sentiment should be thus rewarded! And Greek particles went at less than a tenth the sum. Daphne's grandfather had solved many riddles in a busy life, but this riddle of the honey and the poison was beyond him.

Dudley left his companion and drove to Park Lane upon the first of his errands. He had already sent a telegram to Patrick Foxall, inviting the "wild Irishman" to lunch; and he would not have been surprised to find that worthy in his study. But his housekeeper said that no one had called, and from that she passed on to a rambling apology for the

state of the place, which, she explained, was entirely due to the shortcomings of her maids and the intemperate habits of a disobliging sweep. Dudley made short work of it, and passing at once to his own study, he began that task which was to engross him so greatly. If he reflected how much humanity gives to a house, he could remember at the same time that Daphne would presently bring the light to these gaunt rooms and deck them out with a splendour they had never worn. It was a tribute to the power of her name that he could now go fearlessly where a month ago he had feared to go at all. The silence, the half lights, the papered windows, the white and ghostly furniture were dismal enough ; but in his imagination Daphne moved everywhere, calling in the sunshine and bidding his house awake. In the winter, he said, she would come ; in winter this London would worship her. His quick, impatient movements, his hurried flight from room to room were but expressions of a desire to return to Sonning and to hear again that message of his happiness she alone could speak. Nor would he go empty-handed. He had come to London that he might return with gifts. In his own study the gifts lay—the dower of a kingdom, if the need were.

This, in truth, was the one room which had been held ready against such a surprise as the one his ancient housekeeper now enjoyed. He found the

curtains drawn there, the chairs uncovered, the table dusted, the writing-pad newly turned. There was even a letter upon the table, in a handwriting he did not recognise. But he cared nothing for the letters this morning ; his mind was full of that contemplation which a gift affords ; and, unlocking the safe, he drew out the tray of jewels and showed it to the sunshine. No sight so rare could have rewarded his eyes in all London. Shimmering stones ; diamonds of priceless lustre ; emeralds which a Queen of France had worn ; sapphires so deeply blue that but for the sun they had been black ; opals whose veins of green were like a rare enamel upon a sheen of roses ; turquoises whose blue was of the summer sea, unmatched, inimitable —these in all shapes and sizes, in pendants and rings and brooches, in bracelets of bewitching design, in earrings, in baskets of flowers, in *fleurs de lis*, in roses, littered that tray and dazzled the eye which looked upon them. Many of them had been worn by his dead wife and were powerful to recall the shadows of the darker days. But others he had bought for the love of their beauty ; and of such should his present to Daphne be. Turquoises for giant earrings ; a collar of diamonds for her shapely neck ; bracelets a-many to match the white of her arms—he picked them out one by one and laid them aside with gentle fingers. But rubies he would not

give her. He could not forget that Hermione had died with rubies about her neck. As a man is drawn to morbid things in spite of his will to overlook them, so now he peered into the safe for the string of rubies his wife had worn when she lay dead at his feet, and he had uttered that fervid cry: "Speak to me, Hermione!" He would not give the jewels to Daphne—no, not for twice his fortune. But he would sell them, he said; they should go to-day to his jewellers. He had come to this determination when first he perceived that the rubies were missing.

Very carefully, and with method, Dudley gathered together the gems that were to be Daphne's present and put them aside upon his writing-table. He was a little disturbed that he could not find the missing rubies immediately; but he knew that they were somewhere in the safe, and so he began diligently to search it from the first shelf to the last. The necklace had been a substantial ornament and could not be hidden in any nook or cranny. What, then, had become of it? Certainly Hermione had worn it on that night of nights. He remembered other jewels, her diamonds especially, which had sparkled upon her pretty arms and throat when she confronted him in the grave scene he would not forget to his life's end. One superb bracelet with a crown of sapphires and rubies he remembered par-

ticularly; and this he drew from the shelf to be sure of its identity. But why, if it were thus in safe keeping, should the rubies be missing? He could not answer the question. For a full hour he searched the room and the house, until the truth would be no longer denied. The jewels were gone.

It was not a great matter, perhaps, for many explanations occurred to him, and he was in a mood when a man is easily satisfied. After all, he had been too unwell to concern himself with such little things in that terrible week; and he thought it quite possible that some one had sent the jewels to his bankers. Courvoisier would do it—and yet Courvoisier had this morning left his service. This fact began to force itself upon his memory and to suggest others. He did not like that figure of mystery which imperceptibly almost was growing into his life. It had been his hope that yesterday would obliterate the past so that not one line of it remained to be read. And here was the past confronting him with these perplexing riddles. A strong mind should have done with such perplexities at once. He determined to abide by his purpose of mental discipline. In the end, he said with anger that the jewels were at his bankers' and that he would get them to-morrow. As for Courvoisier—well, he did not count.

Thus ending it, Dudley rose from his chair with a gesture of impatience and went to the window to read the letter which he had remarked when he first entered the room, but had ignored until this time. Three times he read it without being conscious of its meaning; but at the fourth attempt he stood very still, and when he put the letter down, he could not see where he had laid it. Then, strangely preoccupied, he walked to the window and for many minutes together did not move from the place.

* * * * *

Patrick Foxall arrived at Park Lane exactly at two o'clock, and going at once to the study, he found Dudley with the letter between his fingers. His usual greeting, resonant and reverberating, was broken upon his lips when he beheld his friend thus agitated, and realized that his call was in the nature of an intrusion.

"Dudley, me bhoy——! Faith, what is it, now?"

Without a word, Dudley passed the letter across the table, and the Irishman's clumsy fingers closed upon it. Patrick needed glasses for print; and there was a hat to set down, to say nothing of gloves and a stick to be laid upon a chair, before he was ready. But when all was done, and he stood at the window, and cast one glance at the paper and one

at the man who passed it over, he read the words :—

"If Mr. Dudley Hatton would pursue a matter of great importance to him without present interference or subsequent regret, he will hear something of interest by calling to-day at the above address."

Patrick read the letter twice, and then, folding it deliberately, he crossed the room to Dudley's side and expressed his opinion of it without preface.

"By all that's holy, 'tis an impudent blackmailer!" said he.

Dudley took a pen in his hand and made some meaningless marks upon the blotting-pad before him.

"Yes, Pat, I shouldn't be surprised if it were that," he admitted quietly.

"Then what's the meaning of it, what's he being afther? Ye'll know who brought the letter—ye'll have asked that, surely?"

Dudley could answer none of these questions.

"I have asked nothing," he said pathetically. "I'll begin now, Pat."

The old housekeeper herself answered the bell, breathless and very loquacious. No, she was sure she knew nothing of any letter, or with her own hands

she would have posted it that morning. It must have come when she was out. She would ask the maids, but what she suffered with them——

Patrick sent her flying at this point. The maids were no wiser. They were sure that no letter had come by hand.

"Then it's wings it has taken and flown here!" cried the Irishman angrily. "Do letters come through the windows like flying machines?" he asked fiercely. The girl went weeping to the kitchen. "Oh! the brute! the great big brute!" she cried. Patrick, meanwhile, was pacing the room like a caged beast.

"There's some one in the house has a finger in it, and we must be afther finding out," he continued, speaking his thoughts aloud. "The next step is the police, Dudley. We'll call in the police, and they shall go to the address upon the paper. 'Twill be a surprise party, and nothing to pay. Some paltry blackmailer that has heard of your doings and would be selling his lies for any price you name. Ye'll have no truck with them, Dudley—not a word, as I live!"

Dudley did not hear what he said. For a full quarter of an hour Patrick raved and stormed, now dealing with it this way, now that. When he had quite finished, he was astonished to see his friend preparing to leave the house.

"What d'ye mean, man?" he cried; "and what next will ye do?"

"I shall go to the place," said Dudley quietly, "now."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHUTTERED WINDOWS

THEY left the house without further remonstrance and set off at once through Aldford Street and thus towards Berkeley Square. Patrick Foxall had uttered his warning and scarcely knew how he might repeat it. That Dudley was about to do something very foolish, he felt convinced; but the ideas in his own head were confusing and would take no definite shape. Who had written the letter, and what was its immediate object? Money? He scarcely thought it was that. From the first he divined that a strong man's enemies had obtained some secret which might give them a hold over him, and that they would now make use of this power to further their own ends—perhaps to effect a supreme *coup* which only Dudley could frustrate. The "diamond gang," as he put it to himself, certainly had a finger in this pie. How they would crow if Dudley were in exile once more—a wanderer, and impotent to harm them. And if they held a

secret, whom could it concern but the dead woman and the manner of her death? These people, perchance, had trafficked in those rumours which a latter-day school for scandal had toyed with in the weeks following Lady Hermione's death. And what use could they make of them? It depended upon Dudley. Society had sympathized with him, with that sympathy which is akin to vanity. "The poor devil!" it had said. But Draper's Gardens—he would find no sympathy there. They would crush him as quartz is crushed in the rollers of the mines. At the best an ugly scandal must ensue. Patrick fell to asking what was in Dudley's mind—what did his impatience, his agitation mean? The drawn face, the restless eyes told a plain story. He was suffering greatly. Patrick did not dare to ask him why.

"'Tis a mad business," he protested as they went; "and we're a pair of fools to be out upon it. They'll be afther making trouble about the Great Southern Railway, I'm thinking, if it's true that ye've mischief there among the men. Ye'd be wiser to go to the police, Dudley."

This was but a tale, for he knew that the Great Southern Railway was not in the mind of those who had uttered the threat. But he had to say something; and he waited for correction. Dudley's answer was that of a man trying to speak with

measured calmness. It would have been successful with any other but Patrick Foxall.

"There is no trouble on the Great Southern Railway that cannot be handled by a cool head," he said very deliberately. "This is a deeper business, Pat. They have heard some silly story about Hermione and are trying to make capital out of it. You see, it must be that. If I went to the police, I should never know what lies they were selling or who sold them. It is necessary to get to the bottom of the matter, and then to talk of Scotland Yard. You'll agree to that, if you think it over calmly. I should be a madman to go on blindly, fighting in the dark. I'll not do it, Pat; I'll get at the heart of it now—this day!"

His resolution was apparent in the emphasis of every word. He walked with giant strides, as though impatient even at that trifling delay. It had been Patrick's advice that they should go on foot; but Dudley was angry with him now for giving it.

"We could have been there in two minutes," he went on fretfully, "and I should have known by this time. You're giving me bad advice to-day, Pat. Don't you see that I must have it out with them? I dare not tell the police, simply dare not, until I know."

He clenched his hands and hurried on. Patrick,

casting a sidelong glance at him, wondered still more what he feared. These scandalous chronicles had something in them, then; and yet, against that, stood Dudley's apparent frankness.

"'Tis a precious deal they'll tell you if you're not carrying money in your hands," the Irishman said next. "Why, who are ye dealing with but a dirty parcel of blackguards that would as soon take your life as your character if it meant money to them? You're foolish to go, Dudley—more foolish than ever I thought you!"

He buttoned his coat about him as though signifying the dangerous position in which his friend was about to place himself. If he knew that Dudley would not listen to reason, that was no argument for his silence. Indeed, the candour with which he was met disarmed him. He might have been listening to some simple lad who told him a boy's frank story.

"Pat, for the risk I care nothing. I want to tell you—I am going to marry Daphne, the little girl I met at Cambridge. I love her as only a man who feels what I do can love. I shall marry her, and live with her, Pat. If these people think they can come between us, they are mistaken. There is nothing in my life that I need to hide from anybody; I give you my word on that point, Pat."

He reiterated the word "nothing" as though he

might convince himself against conviction. Patrick's hearty "I believe you, my bhoy!" did not satisfy that lingering doubt he so plainly betrayed.

"I believe you, me bhoy; and it's just because I believe you that I'd keep you from the house. What's easier than the plan I'd be afther? You send the letter to Scotland Yard, and the police do the rest. 'Twould be reason, Dudley—and more like yourself to do it!"

"And set all London talking. Do you think these people would hold their tongues because of the police? Not a bit of it. They must be prepared for that. If I go myself, I know the best and the worst. And I'm going, Pat. I'll be in the house in five minutes' time."

Patrick shrugged his shoulders like one who had done his best.

"And I'll be outside, waiting for news of you. If there's any mischief, show yourself at the window. Not that I'd suppose they're likely to try that on, for their game's money. But you never know. 'Tis a rash journey, Dudley, and I wish you were twenty miles away."

"I'll be that to-night, Pat. Daphne's waiting for me at Sonning. What shall I have to tell her—what?"

The cry escaped him unwillingly, and for the moment his thoughts passed to the river and to the

old house there, and Daphne among the roses, and all the scene of light and happiness he had lived through yesterday. Was it the joy of a single day? he asked himself; had this hour blotted it out for ever? He said that it was folly to believe any such thing. He went on again with impatience renewed.

"What was the number, Pat?" he asked presently. "Charles Street, I think you said. You have the letter in your pocket."

Patrick took the document from his ample coat and looked at it as they walked.

"It's Charles Street, 14B," he said.

"That's odd, anyway."

"I've been thinking it from the first."

"A West End house and blackmailers for its tenants. I saw my valet, Courvoisier, going into that place once, Pat."

"Your valet—ye don't mean it! Then it's all as clear as daylight!"

"I wish it were—I wish to Heaven it were!"

Neither spoke again until Charles Street was reached. Patrick, an old campaigner, halted at the corner of Berkeley Square and pointed out the wisdom of his remaining there.

"I'll give you twenty minutes," he said; "if you don't come out by that time, I'm there to fetch you. Good luck to you, Dudley, and mind you

don't kow-tow. Let them know from the first that you'll not pay a penny, and the game's yours! Say that your next step is Scotland Yard. They'll take your meaning, be sure they will."

Dudley nodded his head and pressed on. The house itself was just as it had been on that night of Courvoisier's visit. The blinds were drawn and a shabby board announced that it was to let. The bell which he rang jarred sonorously and echoed in the empty rooms. He waited fully ten minutes on the doorstep before the door was opened to him; and then it was by a wire from within and not by the hand of any servant. In the square hall, uncarpeted and littered by the sweepings of many days, he heard a woman's voice from the floor above asking him to come up. The ground floor of the house he would have said was both tenantless and unfurnished; but as he mounted the stairs, a door at the end of the passage closed suddenly, yet not so quickly that he did not see the hand of the man who shut it. Whatever the mystery of this strange place might be, it gathered force at every step. There were carpets on the landing above, pictures upon the walls, brackets for the electric light. And the drawing-room upon the first floor —that was the greater surprise. It might have served for any West End house, he thought, as he glanced at its mock French furniture; but in a

West End House the curtains would not have been drawn and the electric light turned on. Dudley entered the room with some apprehension and looked round cautiously. It was empty. The woman who called him had disappeared.

He put his hat down upon a chair and began to examine the apartment with some curiosity. Undoubtedly he had taken a great risk in coming to the house; but his curiosity did not give way to fear. These people were admittedly swindlers; they had bought over his valet and would blackmail him. Very well; he would hear their terms. All they asked was money; and they would know that he did not bring money with him.

It had been his first impression that the room was well furnished, but he had not been in it many minutes before certain incongruities jarred upon his own excellent taste and set a new train of ideas going. The ornaments, indeed, were an odd medley. Here was a fine Louis Quinze bureau, there a jimcrack mirror which might have been bought on the hire-system plan. A pretty French chair would be side by side with a wicker abomination. Fine engravings and gaudy prints elbowed each other upon the wall. The clock on the mantelpiece was worth fifty pounds, perhaps; the candlesticks eighteenpence. In the back drawing-room the contrasts were even more remarkable. An oddly

carved mantelpiece supported penny china ornaments. The floor of this room was carpeted with felt; a safe stood in the corner, and upon the top of the safe an iron candlestick. Dudley noticed that the curtains drawn across the front windows were exceedingly thick and dusty. They were, moreover, looped together in three places. Curiosity led him to examine them with some care. It was to be observed that they shut out the daylight completely. He did not know whether the windows behind were shuttered or merely had the blind drawn. But it was very plain to him that a man might be the victim of any outrage in this room and none in the street be the wiser. After all, old Patrick Foxall carried a wise head. It would have been possible to approach these people in another way. He, Dudley, was an impatient fool. And there were men in the house; he had seen one and did not doubt there were others.

A woman entered the room while he was engaged in this critical survey; and shutting the door quickly, she stood there a moment to be sure of his identity. Dudley, turning swiftly, saw that she was a young woman, perhaps not yet twenty-five years old, and that she was dressed in black, with a black lace mantilla drawn closely about her head, so that he could not even see the colour of her hair or eyes. But his quick glance detected a wedding-

ring upon her finger and a diamond above it. Her face, he thought, was not unsympathetic, while her voice was distinctly pleasing.

"Mr. Dudley Hatton?" she said. "Yes, I'm sure it is. How very good of you to come so soon—how very good!"

She advanced to the table and put a chair for him near it. Her actions were slow and deliberate. She did not seem in any way agitated, and her face wore a pleasing smile whenever she spoke.

"I came," said Dudley abruptly, "in answer to a letter delivered at my house this morning. It was an unusual course, perhaps, and I had been better advised to go elsewhere with it. I am sure that you cannot possibly be aware of the nature of such a document as that. Let me suggest—well, that your friends be informed of my visit.

She understood him at once, but did not move from her chair. Her attitude was that of one who had expected such a request and was prepared to answer it.

"I am quite alone, Mr. Hatton," she said smilingly, "or I should not have asked you to come. Of course, I speak for some one else—you have imagined that rightly; but what I have to say could not be so well said by others, perhaps."

Dudley leant forward in his chair and watched her critically. She had begun with a lie. He had

no doubt now that she would continue with others.

"Madam," he said, with a fine perception of his opportunity, "is the person for whom you speak my valet, Courvoisier?"

It was a daring attack, and the words had no sooner escaped his lips than he realized the danger in which he stood. Whatever the woman had been prepared for, it was not for this. Clever actress as he afterwards came to call her, she had no art to conceal the success of this bold charge; indeed, she half rose from her chair in her astonishment, and casting a hurried glance behind her, she appeared to be seeking some signal from an unknown. Dudley, on his part, having taken a course, stood to it without flinching.

"Was it my valet, Courvoisier, madam, who left my service this morning under circumstances which I shall presently investigate—is he the person who should have spoken for you?"

The woman put a hand to her throat as though the mantilla were choking her. The nervous haste of her denial was in itself an admission of the truth.

"No, no," she said, with a little hysterical laugh. "I do not know any such person, Mr. Hatton; I have never heard the name. There are others—let me make it clear to you. We are the friends of

one to whom you have recently shown much kindness. We wish to speak about her. I am a woman and I understand. There is no such person as this Cour—Cour—oh! I cannot remember that name. I have never heard it before."

It was not cleverly done, nor did it deceive him for a moment. Leaning across the table like some advocate who has a victim in his grip, Dudley did not turn his eyes from the woman's face while he pursued the point relentlessly.

"Come!" he said contemptuously, "this is a pretty story, madam. Do you know, I am very much tempted to go to that window and to call in the first policeman I see? If you were not a woman, I certainly should do so. But, madam, there are even women whose sex does not protect them. If you value your own safety, be plain with me. Why have you asked me to come to this house?"

He waited for her answer, watching her lips while she uttered it. If he had imagined that the threat would help him, he was greatly mistaken. This woman had lived half her life among those whose vocation it was to challenge the police; indeed, the violence of his words reassured her. She laughed a little impudently and leant back in her chair, believing that the battle was half won.

"Mr. Hatton," she asked defiantly, "why should you send for the police?

"To give you in custody, madam, for a very impudent attempt to blackmail me."

"Blackmail? I do not understand you. What is blackmail—oh! please tell me that."

Her assumption of innocence was clever, but in no way successful. Dudley stood up angrily and went to the mantelpiece.

"In plain English," he cried, "why have you brought me to this house?"

She shrugged her little shoulders and tapped the table with the point of her fan.

"In plain English, Mr. Hatton, why did you come here?"

The cleverness of the thrust astonished him. Why did he come? An innocent man would have handed the letter to the police. This woman seized at once upon that fatal mistake. His reply was lame, the defence of a man who has no case.

"Why did I come?" he replied, like one who is seeking a story. "I came, madam, I came to save an honest man from thieves. My valet, Courvoisier——"

She stopped him with an exclamation of anger so cleverly feigned that, for the moment, he was half deceived by it.

"Why do you mention that name?" she asked;

"I have told you that I do not know it. What is the good of deceiving yourself, Mr. Hatton? You do not come here for the sake of this person at all—no, no; you come to find out what we know. You come because the shadow of the past is still upon you. You come because your dead wife——"

Dudley swung round upon his heel with a gesture so threatening that the woman rose from her chair and turned pale in spite of her bravado.

"My wife! You dare to speak of her, madam!"

"Since you compel me—yes. She died—let me see, Mr. Hatton, it is a little more than a year ago since the mystery attending her death——"

"The mystery?"

"Yes—but we won't talk of it; it cannot be a pleasant subject either for you or for me, Mr. Hatton. The circumstances under which Lady Hermione died——"

He stopped her with a fierce outburst—

"In Heaven's name, madam, what do you mean?"

He had drawn so near to her that she could feel his breath on her cheek. His eyes were unnaturally bright. She was half afraid that he would strike her. It was plain that his determination to have a clear issue could no longer be thwarted. The woman knew that her friends were near and did not fear him.

"Ask Rupert Hadarley what I mean?" she said in a very low voice.

The uplifted hand dropped to Dudley's side. His nervous fingers closed upon the back of a chair which was near to him. His breathing was quick, almost stertorous. She knew that her secret was his in that moment.

"Rupert Hadarley—ah! I see! You have the impertinence to suggest that he is the friend of my valet, then!"

"Of your valet?—oh, no, not that, believe me." And then, as though she would change the subject quickly, she went on: "Ah! do not be angry; I speak in your own interests. You are about to do a great wrong, a very great wrong—I wish to forbid it."

He went to the window and began to pull at the roped curtain as though to admit the daylight.

"Go on, madam; I am very patient. I am always glad to hear of my own shortcomings. Don't keep anything from me. I should be disappointed if you did."

His cynicism rang falsely; it deceived neither of them. The woman, on her part, took courage at his agitation and laughed when he could not unlace the curtains.

"I am glad you are patient; for you will have much to suffer" she said a little brutally. "Do

not tear my curtains, I beg of you ; the sunshine will not help us—it will not help us at all."

He turned from the window, for the window foiled him ; and picking up his hat and stick from a chair, he made as though he would leave the room.

" You are very considerate, and I am somewhat foolish," he said with a new calm. " The story which you tell me is certainly better than many told in such a den as this. Perhaps I shall ask you to tell it somewhere else before many hours have passed."

She shook her head and drew the shawl closer about her face.

" I think not, Mr. Hatton," she said pointedly ; " indeed, I think not. You are too clever for that. When you are at home, in your own house, you will see that I am right. Believe me, a marriage between you and Daphne Bell is out of the question. I am one of Daphne's oldest friends, and if you compel me, I shall prevent it. Oh ! do not misunderstand me ; I am not frightened of you at all. Perhaps I am sorry ; but it is not the time to speak of it. We cannot blot out the past, Mr. Hatton ; try as we will, it comes before us every day."

She was a consummate actress, and her mock air of a moralist who is shocked added the last straw to Dudley's burden. He had been about to quit the

room and the house; but her threat, the first of its kind that had been uttered, robbed him altogether of his self-control; and he caught the woman suddenly by the wrist and held her in a grip of iron.

"The men in this house—where are they? I must see them!" he cried passionately. "I do not argue with a woman!"

She quailed before him. The blood rushed from her cheeks, and he believed that she was about to cry for help; but she did not raise her voice, and answered him almost in a whisper.

"No—for your own sake, not that! You would gain nothing; you might lose much. Let me go, Mr. Hatton; you are acting foolishly."

He released her arm; but his passion was unabated.

"I insist upon seeing the men who have made you their instrument!" he reiterated stubbornly. "Let us come face to face and have done with it. What have they to sell me—what do they want for it?"

She was still frightened, and step by step drew back from him into the smaller and unfurnished apartment behind the drawing-room.

"They want nothing," she said, with apparent honesty; "nothing at all. You would see them at your peril."

"At my peril let it be, then!"

He waited like one who believed that insistence would prevail; but at the moment when she was about to repeat her warning, a bell rang in the empty basement of the house, and almost immediately another bell sounded on the landing above them. For an instant the woman listened intently; then, as at a prearranged signal, she suddenly put out her hand and switched off the electric light. Profound and utter darkness fell upon the room. Not a ray of sunlight came through the veiled windows. Dudley could not hear even a step upon the parquet of the uncarpeted room. There were voices in the hall below, the voices of men; but in the room itself that of which he could make nothing —a current of fresh air blowing he knew not whence. It became apparent to him at once that he was in a situation of grave personal danger, and, expecting every moment that men would burst into the room, he began to grope blindly for the switch which the woman had touched. Many minutes passed before he could find it or call back the scene. Here and there, his hands flapping upon the bare walls, he stumbled in that blind quest. The intensity of the darkness was beyond all belief. He said that he was trapped in the room—a prisoner, the victim of the vulgarest conspiracy. And then, upon a lucky chance, his hand touched the switch, the light shone out, everything was as it had been. And he was

alone. The woman had gone out by way of the back drawing-room. She had vanished in an apartment with no visible door to it.

A dead silence had fallen upon the house now, and it was broken only by the bell which still jangled in the basement below. A quick thinker, Dudley began to see that, whoever were the agents of this vulgar affair, they, at least, were sufficiently afraid of interference from without to vanish at the first warning of it. Not a sound could he hear, not a whisper of voices. The room through which the woman had escaped possessed neither door nor curtain by which an aperture might have been concealed. There were no pictures upon the walls; nothing was disturbed or moved; the paper betrayed no crevice where a false door might have stood. Perplexed to the last point, trembling with an excitement altogether foreign to him, Dudley hurried down the stairs to answer the bell which rang in the basement for the second time. Patrick Foxall had come for him, he was sure. Never had he welcomed a friend as he welcomed old Pat, standing there, impatient and threatening, upon the doorstep.

"The very man! Come in, Pat. I want to find out who is in this house—come in and help me."

Old Pat clutched his great stick with a monstrous hand and peered into the dark passage.

"What is it, me bhoy? What fool's tale have ye been hearing?"

"They're low blackmailers, Pat, and I want their names. If there are twenty of them, I mean to have it out! Come in and be the witness."

Pat laughed at the promise of danger, and cried out in a voice which half the street might have heard—

"The police on the beat are waiting till I come out—I've told 'em the story. Go on, Dudley; Buckingham Palace is not safer this day!"

He had done no such thing; but his wit prompted the bold assertion. In the house itself nothing justified his apprehensions. A little room at the end of the passage was furnished with a plain bed, which had recently been slept in; but it and the kitchens below were entirely deserted. The empty dining-room, wherein Dudley had seen a man's hand as he went upstairs, was now tenanted only by feeble rays of sunshine which came through the yellow blinds. Unconvinced, and listening at every turn for the whisper of a voice or the sound of a footstep, the men mounted from landing to landing, to make assurance doubly sure. Every room added a new mystery. There was no one in the house. Save for that pretentious smartness of the drawing-room, it was as bare as a vault.

* * * * *

In the cab which drove them from Charles Street, Dudley told the whole story, adding nothing, keeping nothing back. He had been to the house, had seen the woman, had listened to her threat that she would stop his marriage. The rest was the unknown.

"What's the meaning of it, Pat?" he asked, like a child in his trouble; "what do they want—what's their idea? It isn't money, if the woman's to be believed; and yet they talk of preventing my marriage with Daphne. Where will it end? what's behind it all? If they'd have asked ten thousand pounds, I would have met them face to face and had it out upon the spot; but they didn't. She says they do not want a penny! What am I to believe —what am I to do?"

Old Patrick, with his hat upon the back of his head, and an unlighted cigar between his fingers, used his wits as he had not used them for many a long year.

"Dudley," he said bluntly, at last, "if you tell me how your wife died, I can be a better friend to you. It's that, man—all that!"

"I know it, Pat. You see, they're trying to get at the doctor. He was always Hermione's favourite, but I never liked him. Perhaps his servants told them some story about the certificate. I have nothing to conceal about Hermione's death; she died after a quarrel——"

"Ah! but you did not mention that, Dudley——"

"Well, I mention it now. We quarrelled. She left me. She was found dead in the night. It's the truth—before Heaven, Pat! Hadarley spoke of irregularity, and then gave the certificate. I am sure it was out of kindness. If this is true, it was nothing of the kind!"

Patrick was silent for a little while. Then suddenly he poked his stick through the trap and gave a new order to the cabman.

"Where's this Rupert Hadarley live?" he asked bluntly.

"South Audley Street—by the Mount Street crossing."

"We'll drive there, Dudley; we'll see him."

* * * * *

They drove to the house; but when Dudley would have sent up his card to a flat upon the first floor, the commissionaire returned it.

"Doctor Hadarley's in South Africa, sir," he explained patronizingly; "he's been gone these three months."

Patrick did not whine at the blow; he had not been unprepared for it. There were other ideas beginning to shape themselves in a mind accustomed to such problems.

"Dudley," he said presently, "could you spare me a thousand pounds?"

"If it will help me, ten, Pat."

"I cannot say. I'll do my best. Do you go back to Sonning and wait the news of me."

Dudley assented almost without interest.

"Yes," he said, "I am going back to Sonning—to tell Daphne everything."

Patrick struck a match and lighted a cigar.

"Ye're a brave man, and a wise one, Dudley," said he.

CHAPTER XIX

CONFESSION

DAPHNE was at Romer's side in the motor-car when the afternoon express from London steamed into Reading Station. She wore a river blouse of cream-coloured silk, and a great straw hat with a heliotrope feather for its only ornament. Dudley espied her at once when he stepped from the carriage; and pushing through the press of busy people, he took the hands outstretched to him.

"I must, even if they're looking!" she said affectionately, while she lifted her face to his and walked with him through the barrier; "and, of course, they're not; they're going to the refreshment-room! Oh, dearest, dearest! it has been such a long time, and you—you look so ill, so changed.

Her voice was gentle with a woman's pity and won a grateful smile from him.

He told her that the journey had tired him.

There had been bad news in London—yes, he would speak of it by and by. He was sorry that it had been such a long day; but he had not found it short himself. The distracted air, the nervous desire to talk, did not deceive Daphne at all. Her big eyes scanned his face intently, searching for that secret which was hidden from her. Her own madcap gaiety had been lost at the first word he spoke. She knew not what to say or how to question him. She left it to Romer to recount the uneventful history of the Sonning hours. And Romer was very eloquent.

"We pulled up to the bower, and Daphne wanted to be drawn by swans. I tried to catch one, and the brute upset the lunch. Lohengrin is dead, or we might have got a tip or two! I played Wagner's music on the banjo; and Percy's been catching chub. He'll be ready to lie about them at ten o'clock to-night. She's been in the rose-garden all the afternoon, and I've been reading Roman law. It ought to be useful when my tailor duns me for that account you paid him last term. I shall write to him in Latin, and he'll think it's a secret society—but I wished you looked better, Uncle Dudley; you're rather knocked out, aren't you?"

Dudley avoided him with a discreet excuse, and the swift car soon set them down in the quadrangle of Sonning Court. The scene there was typical of

an English country house upon the close of a summer's day. Men, in the whitest of white flannels, played tennis in the gardens by the rosery; a tea-table had been set under a gigantic cedar-tree before the windows of the hall; the silver shone brightly upon the spotless cloth; old china gave colour to the picture. In the distance you had vistas restfully green, suggesting remoter glades in a forest's heart; the sheen of the setting sun flushed crimson upon the lazy river and touched all things with its mellow lights. Young voices were to be heard, the splash of oars, the twittering of birds, the pheasants' cluck. Nature answered to the splendour of the dying day. The call to rest was spoken by every glade and shadow of the spreading trees. Well might a man have claimed dominion of such a home and said: "Here will I rest; here will I live"; but Dudley, returning to that gentle homage which all paid him so willingly, could utter no such aspiration. This night might be the last he would ever know at Sonning Court.

He had determined to tell Daphne, to tell her all. Whatever the night cost him, it should be the night of her judgment. For the first time he had begun to see whither the events of the day were leading him and what was their goal. He knew now that those enemies of his, many of them nameless, all irreconcilable, were closing in about him in this

crisis of his life, and would stand at nothing in a last endeavour to accomplish his ruin. A clever brain, awakening to the danger, permitted him to say that, vulgar as the conspiracy was, none the less a shrewd ingenuity devised it. The treachery of one man, one whom he had accounted among the most faithful of his servants, gave him the key to this peril in which he had been enveloped so swiftly. They had bought Courvoisier—he never doubted it. By money also would they seek to buy the evidence of those who had attended his wife in her last illness. Neither valet nor doctor could of his own wit conceive a method of attack so subtle and devilish. He understood now why money was not the immediate quest of those who would ruin him. Judging the time ripe, they had said: "We will stand between this man and his happiness, drive him out by threats, destroy him by shame." They played for a greater stake than money, the destruction of his hope, of his new content, that from the ashes of his ruin the house of their own fortune, phœnix-like, might rise again. And to this threat, so subtle, there could be but one answer. He must destroy the weapon while it was yet young in their hands. He must tell Daphne. He knew that his reason—nay, it might be his very life—depended on that fateful hour of his confession.

It should be to-night; he was determined upon that, for delay galled him, and his impatience was not to be endured. The resolution followed him to his dressing-room; he renewed it at the dinner-table, where it set him apart from those whose leisure of the day became, in jest and laughter, the promise of the morrow. If these young people spoke of his depression, railed at it or were compassionate, their own occupation soon engrossed them again; and they left to Daphne that continuing solicitude for which, at any other hour, Dudley had been so grateful. Daphne's now to watch him with loving eyes, to express the mute question, to be conscious that even in the face of her love he might be unhappy. And how she waited for the after hour; how quick she was to answer "Yes" when he would take her to the gardens, apart from all, to the bower where but last night the intimate word of her own confession had been spoken! Ah! she would know now. She scarcely waited until the voices were lost before her hands were closed upon his and her pity found expression.

"Tell me, dearest, what has happened. Oh! there is something—I knew it, I felt it directly you came. I read your face—will you not let me understand to-night, Dudley? You promised; yes, you promised!"

His heart beat quickly. His hand upon her own was hot as the hand of one in a fever. He turned his face from her and looked into the shadows when he spoke.

"I shall keep the promise, Daphne," he said in a broken voice; "yes, I came here for that. Last night we both thought that we understood; but we did not. I blame myself. I did not tell you; but I am going to tell you now. It is the story of my life, Daphne; I want you to hear it."

She clung to him in a close embrace, as though to say: "Whatever it be, I love you because of it!" The woods about them had fallen to the hush of sleep. A cold, grey light fell upon the river to cloak it with the gloom of twilight. There were boats by the island, but they seemed to move almost imperceptibly. The sun had set and darkness came to the glades. Daphne clung to her lover as though the night were their enemy.

"I wish what you wish, dear Dudley," she cried, desiring only that he should say: "She trusts me." "If you think that I should know, tell me. But I would never ask you. I am sure that it has been a brave life; one who loves you could ask nothing more—there is nothing else to hear."

"There might be something, Daphne. Her love asks nothing, it is true; her friendship never doubts. She says: 'It is right because my friend

has done it.' She gives all because of her belief. Would you give me that, dear child, if I asked it of you to-night ? "

She drew him down to her and kissed his lips almost passionately.

" Heart and soul, I would give it you, Dudley. Have I any other gift but myself ? Oh ! it is so little, so little to make so much of ! Dear friend, I am such a child that you should think of me, that you should say : ' Come with me through life.' How can I repay you if it is not to say : ' I trust ; I shall never doubt unto my life's end ' ? "

She pressed her forehead to his lips, and for a little while neither spoke. The silence all about them typified the gathering night. There was no longer a grey light upon the river. The windows of the distant house were like stars shining through the thicket. Dudley trembled when he began to speak again.

" The common things of life leave us our idols sometimes. I always try to think of Hermione as I wished her to be ; I would like to think of her so to-night."

" She must have been very proud of you, Dudley."

" In her own way, perhaps. She did not understand me. Her ambitions were not my ambitions ; and that estranged us. She disliked my business,

and I disliked her amusements. If she had known it, Daphne, what I wanted was a woman's sympathy, such a sweet sympathy as I found yesterday and shall never forget. I had been ill for many months, and it was hard to suffer all alone. Then came the crisis. I went to a doctor, and he ordered me to give up business. I could not do it, Daphne, I hadn't the courage."

"I understand that, Dudley; you could never give it up. You would regret it always. No one is happy who regrets."

"Ah! but Hermione did not see it like that. I can make excuses for her now, if I could not then. I do not suppose one of her own family ever did a day's work in his life. She couldn't understand why I sought power or what it meant to me. I was a stranger in my own house, Daphne; I rarely heard a kind word there. If it had been otherwise, I do not think my health would have broken down. But the end came suddenly. You do not know what I suffered, child! I think for some months I was almost mad!"

Some memory of this suffering was spoken in the faltering voice and the emotion of his words. He lived again through the bitter scenes of his solitude. But how differently! For now the full measure of a woman's pity was given to him; and clinging to him, caressing him, a woman bade him hope.

"Oh! dearest, dearest!—if I had known, if I could have come to you in those days! But it will all be forgotten now. I shall help you, watch you, love you, Dudley! You will never think of the old days if I am with you!"

He had all the desire to answer her with a fervent protest; but the resolution forbade him; and, turning from her pity as from that which he might not enjoy, he bowed to his destiny.

"I would gladly forget them, Daphne; but, for your sake and mine, it is forbidden! When a man is warned as I am, he has a duty to others which he may not neglect. A year ago Doctor Chaplin told me that my reason would give way if I did not abandon everything and rest. I believe that his opinion was justified then, if it is not now. But how can I know for certain? If my illness recurred, what right have I to speak of love to you? None, dear child; I know that I have none——"

"You have every right, every right, dear Dudley," she said a little wistfully. "If you are ill, is not my place at your side? Let it be that always. Let me find my world there. It would be happiness for me, the greatest happiness I can know."

He answered her with a lover's caress, but did not say: "It shall be so"; and for a little while they walked together in silence beneath the sheltering canopy of leaves. A fresh wind of the night stirred

the thicket all about them. None intruded upon a confidence so fateful. And the lovers' thoughts lay apart; for while her trust and gentleness added to the burden of his task, she, despite her love, was like a child perplexed by some mystery beyond its understanding. How different it all was from the splendid romance of the childish years! The heroic face of her dream, though she knew it not, altered its aspect with every word of his confession. This revelation of a manhood that did not give, but asked the courage of life, was altogether new to her. The figure of her dream had been mighty, fruitful in strength, and helpful to her womanhood. She had rejoiced in her girlish dependence, for he who was coming into her life would seek her worship. But this unheroic attitude she had not imagined. She said that her love could not be the less for it.

"You are speaking of that which is passed, Dudley," was her answer, when they came out into the open again, and the moon gave a clear light to the terrace of the old-world garden. "Why should we bring it back to-night? why should we think of it?"

"Because we must, Daphne—you and I. We must ask ourselves if we are doing well. You do not know the truth yet; I am trying to tell it you."

"The truth—the truth of what, dear Dudley?"

He could see the startled expression of her eyes and feel the little hand tremble upon his arm; but he knew that he might not spare her.

"The truth of Hermione's death," he said, though every word cost him an effort. "She died after we had quarrelled, Daphne. I have never known the whole of it. I think I was mad that night. I only know that we quarrelled, and that when next I found her she was dead. The rest is oblivion; I cannot tell you what I did. I would give my fortune to know!"

He stepped back from her so that her hands fell from his arm; and, clasping them, she tried to speak to him.

"Dearest, dearest! what are you saying?"

"I am telling you the truth, Daphne. I do not know how my wife died. There are some who say that I killed her!"

She uttered a low cry and turned from him, pressing her hands to her death-white face. The idol had fallen now; it lay shattered at her feet. She was terrified, stricken dumb, a child before one of life's great tragedies.

"No, no! no, no! You are not telling me the truth! I will not hear you, Dudley—you are cruel, cruel! You frighten me!"

He caught her by the arm, fearing that she would

fall, and began to lead her gently towards the house.

"I wish to Heaven I could say 'No!'" he said, in a voice grown hoarse with the pain of that confession. "It is true, true, every word of it, dear child. I do not know how Hermione died. That is why I speak to you to-night. Ask yourself if I have the right to marry any woman. You cannot answer me, Daphne! You cannot, child!"

His tone had changed to that of one who would charge her with the consequence of his own confession. She could not answer him, indeed. As he suffered, so did she. She knew not why she was silent. Fear, an overwhelming, abiding fear, closed her lips. It forbade her pity. She must think, think. The words had plunged her into that soul's darkness whereto no ray of her love might come. Of all his confession, she heard but this, that he had no right to marry her because of that which he had done.

"I must be alone, Dudley. I must think!" she cried at last, turning her pale face from him and avoiding his touch. "To-morrow it may be different. I cannot answer you to-night."

"You will never answer me, Daphne. We have met for the last time. It is our destiny. God make it light for you and for me!"

She ran from him into the house. In her own

room, her courage failed her and she fell sobbing upon her bed. But midnight found Dudley alone, a figure of the shadows in the moonlit gardens.

CHAPTER XX

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

HE quitted the house with the sunlight, leaving for Daphne's grandfather a letter in which he spoke of business urgencies. For Daphne herself he left no message. It was not without a sense of relief that he had crossed the valley of the shadow; but he knew that the goal for which he had striven was lost to him irretrievably. That supreme devotion upon which he had counted had failed him in the hour of his need. A woman who loved, he said, would have answered him there and then, disbelieving the charge he brought against himself and showing him how false it was. But she had doubted him. He believed it was that. She, as those others, had said: "It may be so." Her fear repelled him. He, who had so loved, had earned a title to the generosity of her affection. She should have said: "Though all the world doubts, I believe"; but she shrank from him, had gone away as one who feared his touch. So let it be; he would never show his face to her again. He would ask her to forget that he had lived.

The whole house was sleeping when he wrote the letter; and having written it, he changed his clothes and made ready for his journey. The silence of the morning hour attuned itself to his own need. He was glad that all should be sleeping and he awake to suffer. The cold air of day found him shivering as with an ague and very weary; but he defied sleep; and when he had drunk a little glass of brandy, he took a stout stick in his hand and quitted Sonning Court by the servants' gate. In the lonely gardens, the vista of the woods shaped already by the wan rays of a cloudy dawn. The old house, every gable clear-cut in that mournful light, rose up like some vault of his happiness. He cursed the day which had carried him out of Cornwall and his exile to this brief dream of happiness and love. The gardens wherein Daphne had walked, the rosery, the sheltered glades, were so many landmarks upon that road he had followed gladly. And whither would it lead him now? He looked at the black water of the river and asked himself what kept him back from the rest which is eternal. A coward would have answered "Nothing;" but he was not a coward; he would yet live to repay to the uttermost farthing that debt of vengeance over which his enemies had exulted.

And herein was to be seen that unlooked-for turn of events by which ultimately his fortunes were

shaped so strangely. It had been in the minds of Dudley's enemies that their unscrupulous attack must drive him from their midst and hold him, impotently, an exile, as erstwhile he had been. For this they schemed ; in this belief their plans were laid. Threatened by the gravest charge, they had no doubt that he would quit London and leave to them that financial field wherefrom, in his absence, they garnered so full a harvest. But it chanced that the very act which drove their victim out sent him upon the same day back to the world, there to meet them face to face. From the first hour, revenge was Dudley's impulse of life. He would return to London and map the battle-ground. Such pity as they had dealt to him should be their measure. In the past, even the worst of them had found him a generous enemy. His house had earned an envied reputation. He used to say that a code of honour, foreign to Drapers' Gardens, cost him a considerable income. But these very men who had profited by his tolerance were those who contrived this infamy. He was resolved to throw down the glove to them. Sentiment should guide him no longer ; he would wage an unscrupulous war against the enemies of his financial fortunes ; he would live for gain. Let the means be what they might, the end should be paramount.

He had struck upon the Maidenhead road, which

led him away from the river to Twyford and the railway. By here and there he passed labourers going doggedly to the fields; there were gipsies in a nook of his own woods, and the rags of the children fluttered at his approach and showed the naked arms and legs of sunburnt beggars. Children rarely begged of him in vain in the old days, but he thrust them aside this morning and gave nothing. The friendly greetings of early neighbours were scarcely answered. At Taplow station an inspector's loquacious welcome met with no better reward. London beckoned him like some goal of despair. He did not listen until the station-master spoke of London.

"I am sorry to hear of this trouble on your line, sir," the man said, believing that the news brought him to Twyford. He could imagine no other reason.

Dudley asked what news there was. He had heard nothing.

"It was in last night's paper, sir. They say your men are coming out."

"I did not see it," Dudley said, with a new interest. "You speak of the Great Southern, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There seems to have been a meeting at Battersea last night, and, from what I hear, things went badly. It's a pity you weren't

there, sir. If you'll excuse my saying so, you're worth a hundred of the others. They'd have listened to you, sir, please believe me."

This compliment would have flattered Dudley at any other time. He resented it this morning. His mind strove constantly to persuade his heart that it had no longer any interests in men or their troubles. He was like one who had his back to the wall against the whole world. This grave news promised him his opportunity. Why should he spare these men? The Great Southern Railway was his own undertaking; he was proud of it—responsible in a measure for its success. If it had not prospered in the past, he laid that to the charge of his own humanity. Why should humanity count henceforth?

"If the men want me, they know where to find me," he said bluntly to the official. "When is the next train to London?"

"There is nothing till the seven forty-five, sir."

"I can't wait for that; I must have a special."

Specials are not often asked for at Twyford Junction. The station-master, greatly important, made haste to appear as though it were a very simple matter.

"We shall have to telegraph to Reading, sir."

"Telegraph where you like. I must have a special."

"It will mean half an hour, sir."

"Then don't waste your time here. Go away and telegraph."

The man went away very pleased at such an honour as a special for his own station; but Dudley, forgetting it already, fell to wondering how Daphne would awake to-day.

* * * * *

He arrived at Paddington a little after six o'clock. No one was awake in Park Lane when he reached the house. He asked for a simple cup of coffee, and drank it while he despatched a messenger to, Macalister, his partner in the firm of Hatton and Hatton. That discreet Scotsman was just about to set out for the City when the news came; but he returned at once with the groom and found Dudley in his study. His recognition was one of surprise and pity.

"Man!" he said shortly, "you're very ill!"

Dudley took a cigar from his box and lighted it with some deliberation.

"The very thing I wish you to put about this morning, James," he said phlegmatically.

Macalister eyed him with suspicious curiosity. The pallid face gave to the sunken eyes the brightness which often attends fever. The cheeks were furrowed as they had not been yesterday. The

hands were shrunken and nervous. The mouth twitched when the lips were still. Macalister had seen Dudley under many circumstances, but never like this.

"What do you mean? what's the matter with you?" he asked in his brusque way. "I'm thinking you'd be better to bide in bed, by the looks of you, Dudley!"

Dudley laughed with a grim humour that meant much.

"If you like," he said, "put me in bed, James. Let Drapers' Gardens understand that I have had a great blow. Get it about as quickly as you can, over the tape if possible. We're going to make some money, you and I, to-day, James."

"I'll be no party to anything inordinary," said the Scotchman determinedly. He had never heard such a suggestion as this. And Dudley turned on him fiercely.

"What, man! isn't it true? Look at me! Am I well or ill? Would you put sixpence on my life if you were a stranger?"

The Scotchman took a snuff-box from his pocket and opened the lid of it clumsily.

"Chaplin will be your doctor," he remarked, after a pause. "He shall see you this day."

Dudley did not resent the proposal.

"Excellent!" he remarked, with a finer irony.

"He calls here before eleven; it is known in the House at twelve; you will buy Louisvilles at one—buy heavily. And every shillingsworth of Great Southern Stock you can sell for the next week let the market have. Do you follow me?"

Macalister was agitated in spite of himself. Coveting money patiently, he found himself at war already with conflicting principles. Should a rumour of Dudley's collapse reach Drapers' Gardens, the crash would be tremendous, he remarked. But what of the aftermath, the day of reckoning? This man beside him seemed at death's door. If he died, the house of Hatton and Hatton would fall like a pack of cards. A disciple of the truth (*rara avis* in Drapers' Gardens), Macalister tried to tell himself that it was the truth. Dudley undoubtedly was very ill.

"'Twould be no lie to say as much," he admitted at last; "but I'll be no party to any prevarication. Man, your health's your ain—and poor enough at that. Should they find you out, there'll be the devil of a settlement!"

Dudley raised his hand.

"Not a word of it," he said; "it's not your business. Tell them to mind their own. I am ill, James—ill enough, Heaven knows! Let those who have made me suffer pay the price. If I pull through, Heaven help them, James!"

Macalister lowered his heavy brows and watched his partner shrewdly.

"There's been trouble in your own house, then?" he remarked at a hazard.

"It's not difficult to guess that, James; there's been great trouble. I am here because of it. I am here to answer the men who brought it about. I shall begin when you go the City."

There was no need to tell James Macalister another word. He picked up his hat and buttoned his frock-coat.

"If there's any justice betwixt man and man, I'll help you this day!" said he. "But I'd be sorry for the innocent to suffer."

Dudley laughed again.

"The innocent always suffer. You and I cannot help the fools, James! We have something else to do."

* * * * *

The City has not yet forgotten that day upon which Dudley Hatton returned to London. Brokers speak of it even now with a bitter phrase, as of some widespread conspiracy by which they suffered. The names of those whom the cataclysm brought down are referred to without pity. The survivors ask sympathy for themselves.

It began at eleven o'clock on the morning of the day. The subtle rumour ran from ear to ear and

office to office like a current of greed and gain. Men spoke of it at first in corners; anon openly. Dudley Hatton, the King of the Financiers, had been stricken down and lay dying. Some said that he had finally lost his reason; others named the physicians in attendance upon him. While one report left him at Sonning, unconscious and beyond hope, another brought him to London and promised him but a few hours of life. Soon that pandemonium which heralds crisis set up in the purlieus of Throgmorton Street. In the House itself a multitude of throats cried in descending scale the story of the downfall and even sober men surrendered themselves to the intoxication of panic. Telegrams fell as a shower of leaves before the gathering storm; cabs rattled incessantly upon the asphalt pavements. There were groups about every tape in the outer offices. Men saw their fortunes melting before their very eyes; yet down, and still down, rattled that fabric whose foundations were but a name. Great throngs surged about the well-known doors and uttered the news as some sentence of doom. Those who were rich men at eleven o'clock were beggars at four. Few profited by that hurricane of disaster. Wild messages to Park Lane, to Sonning, to Dudley's yacht in the Solent, appeared to confirm the news. When night fell upon the City, it was said that Hatton was dead. Men went

westward reluctanly. Some had looked upon the scenes of their success for the last time.

* * * * *

And the truth? Ah! days passed before that was known! For while the storm gathered, and the tempest broke, and the madness of panic fell upon the bewildered City, one man, as the master of the storm, sat at the helm of the driving ship and steered it whither he would. From hour to hour, sometimes from minute to minute, the messengers had entered and received their instructions. By a word sometimes, by a sentence at others, the spoil was netted. When night fell, the helmsman was alone. But the treasure of the ship he could not reckon.

In a few short hours he had won a fortune, had answered his enemies in the words of his promise.

CHAPTER XXI

IN LETTERS OF DUST

DUDLEY had left Sonning Court believing that no one had witnessed his departure ; but in this he was mistaken, for Daphne heard his step upon the path, and she watched him when he set out upon the Twyford road. Her night of tears had ended in a day of a woman's resolution. Yesterday a man's confession left her child and witless. She had turned upon an impulse of fear and fled from him who had the title to her courage. Her dream of heroic love had been so real, so dear to her, that the awakening frightened her to silence. It was all so different from the future she had imagined. That a woman must share a man's sorrows, as she would share his joys, had been no part of the girlish creed in which she delighted for so many years. She loved with all her heart, and yet it had seemed to her that Dudley's confession robbed her of this

right to love. Why had it changed his tenderness towards her? why had he spoken to her like a man in anger? She could not believe the dreadful story he had told her; she had never really believed it. But the first shock deprived her of the will to deny it. She was a child still in the face of tragedy so terrible. She knew that Dudley charged himself falsely, but his nervous anger at her silence she could not understand.

Why had she not said at once: "I will trust you; I will be your friend even now"? Dudley, she thought, was to be blamed for her own cowardice. She could not say: "I believe nothing—will hear nothing," with those hot words still in her ears. The new day found her longing ardently for that moment when she might go to him and say: "Dudley, forgive me! I did not know." The thought that she could bring joy to him was the solace to her grief. He had loved another woman, but not to his own happiness. Daphne remembered how he had spoken of Hermione's coldness, of her want of pride in him, of the growth of an inevitable estrangement. And she—she who had loved him so—had she not acted as the dead wife in the hour of his greatest need? Her tears of distress became, anon, tears of self-reproach. The night did not pass quickly enough for her desire. If she could find him, find him before any stirred in the house, and

run to him, and in his arms forget that he had spoken! She fought with sleep for that. She must see him at the very break of day.

She did not undress, but lay upon her bed with the cloak she had worn in the garden still wrapped about her. Towards the hour of dawn, fatigue, which she had defied so long, mastered her a little while, so that she dreamed she was at Cambridge again, looking from the window of Queens' upon the river and the Fellows' gardens. In her troubled sleep she believed that Dudley waited for her and was in great distress; but when she tried to rise, a dream-figure of the darkness forbade her, and all the doors and windows round about were locked. This suffering of sleep was very real, and when she started up from her bed she knew that she had been crying. The daylight streamed into her room at this time, and, despite a glowering morn, the birds were singing in the garden, and she heard the murmur of the weir. The familiar scene brought to her a sorrowful memory of Dudley's confession, and looking upon her own dress and the cloak tumbled upon the bed, she remembered everything and chiefly her own desire to go to him.

It must now be six or seven o'clock, she told herself, and perhaps he would be awake. The best of fortune would have sent him already to the gardens awaiting her; and when she heard a step upon the

gravel of the drive, she ran with fluttering heart to the window, believing that indeed it was so. The truth was a new hurt to her pride. For Dudley was there as she wished, but even a first look made it plain that he was about to quit the terrace. This was such a humiliation for her, so contrary to her desire and belief, that she had no ready courage even to open her casement or to lift a hand to beckon him. It was evident that he was leaving Sonning. For an instant he paused upon the steps of the terrace in fitful hesitation ; then, with firm stride and an impatient gesture of the hands, he set out towards the lodge, and the shrubs of the drive hid him from her view. Daphne knew not what to think of it. She dressed in bitter haste, caring nothing for the clothes she wore. Dudley would return to breakfast, and she would go to him and tell him all her pretty story. It was her only hope. She did not know how many long days must pass before she would hear his voice again.

The servants were up and about when, at last, she went downstairs, but none of them knew anything of their master's departure. Dudley lacked a valet now, and old Spiler, the butler, proved a clumsy substitute. He had taken the hot water up, he said, but was not sure whether Mr. Hatton were awake or not. Daphne did not tell him what she had seen or speak of it to any one ; but she counted

the minutes until eight o'clock, their breakfast hour, and when eight was struck, and after that nine, and no message came, the truth confronted her and she knew that he would not return. Overwhelmed by self-reproach, heart-broken, she ran from the house like one who cheated herself with the delusion that she might still find him where she had found him in the supreme hour of her life. She longed ardently to be alone with him. She spake her grief where none might hear.

It was twelve o'clock when she returned to the house, to find the guests wondering both at Dudley's departure and at her own absence. To Romer, and those who were with him on the tennis-court, she made some good excuse. It was more difficult to answer little Beryl, and the child's questions troubled her.

"What is it, Daphne—why is he gone to London? Oh! you know and you won't tell me! It must have been something, or he wouldn't have gone without saying good-bye to me. Was he ill, dear—do you think he was ill?"

Daphne said that it was nothing and went up to find her grandfather. She wished to conceal everything from him, but his quick eyes, aided by the letter which Dudley had left, were not to be deceived. When she said "Good-morning" to him, he took her hand in his and kissed her with some affection.

He thought that there had been a lovers' quarrel—that and nothing more. But he was not a little surprised that it should be so soon.

"He's gone to London, Daph!" he admitted, with gentleness in every tone. "Perhaps you know why he's gone? I won't ask you, my dear. I'm thinking how very glad you'll be when he comes back."

Daphne flung herself into an arm-chair (they were alone in the library) and gazed into the empty firegrate.

"He won't come back, Daddy," she said; "he'll not come back while I am here."

She spoke with such an earnestness and so defiantly that her grandfather, who believed that it was but a lovers' tiff, put on his spectacles and regarded her very critically.

"Why, what is it, Daphne?—you've been crying, child!"

She tried to say that she had not; but the tears came to her eyes again when she protested—

"It's nothing, nothing, Daddy. He'll not come back, and it's my fault—and I wish I had never entered this house!"

The bitter truth found its measure of consolation in this wild confession. Daphne had determined to tell her grandfather nothing; but kindness, attuned to her own grief, dragged the words from

her; and, so far as she might regarding Dudley's honour, she told him much.

"He has had great trouble, Daddy. I was unkind and frightened. He will never forgive me! That's why he's gone to London. Of course he won't come back—I could not expect it."

She clung to him in the bitterness of grief, and he, knowing Daphne, and understanding, took her in his arms and said—

"We must go home, little Daph; he shall find you there."

* * * * * *

They left the house by the afternoon train, but not until Daphne had spent a full hour upon the contrite letter in which she confessed to Dudley all the childish wrong of her doubt and hesitation. Such a page betrayed the unmeasured truth of a young girl's love. How she reproached herself! with what promise would she not atone! She offered him all —her belief in his innocence, her willing sympathy and loving care; she would return to him whenever he might command her. Her affection was unchanged, unchanging. And this letter, costing her so much of shame and tears, she left with those who promised that it should reach the master without delay.

Mr. Hatton would return to-morrow, the servants

said. They laid the letter upon the library table, expecting him without delay. It had gathered dust abundantly, and many weeks were numbered before Daphne's sweet confession came to Dudley's hand.

BOOK IV

THE DAWN

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE MARBEAU

PERCY ELLINGHAM was away to the North so soon as the grouse season began, and Trevor Webb remembered that he had mountains to climb, and set out about the business with a philosopher's leisure. Of the three, Romer alone idled at Sonning when the stifling month of August drew to its welcome close. Old Aunt Mary had come down to take charge of that forlorn establishment and to warn all and sundry against the perils of damp linen and the treachery of misty nights. From day to day little Beryl wrote to Dudley and wondered that he answered her so curtly or did not answer her at all. To the house itself the vaguest news of its master's movements came. Dudley was in London, but not at

Park Lane, report said. They heard of his financial triumphs ; the papers did not tire of his name. He had recovered from a grave illness, said the paragraphists, and was the busiest among the busy of Drapers' Gardens and its purlieus. The tattlers for society papers summed his fortunes in cabalistic drawings, or showed you how his linked gold would girdle the earth. Others attacked him fiercely in pamphlets of surpassing bitterness. One newspaper named him for a greedy tyrant and oppressor of men. Even his friends wondered if his principles had not been modified. He was making a rare fortune, they admitted, but were the means to be justified ? The pessimists believed that the Great Southern Railway would yet be the grave of his ambitions. He had not done with that trouble yet.

Beryl used to ask Romer every day why Dudley did not return and why Daphne had left them ; but the answers were evasive, and she could make nothing of them.

" When you are a woman, you'll know," Romer used to say patriarchally. " You should never ask for reasons when girls are concerned. A game of patience is nothing to them. They can never understand why their queen should not take your king. I always liked Daphne—but I'll be hanged if I can make head or tail of her ! She seemed to be awfully fond of Uncle Dudley, and just when I was wonder-

ing what I should give him for a wedding present, off she goes! It's worse than Roman Law, Beryl. You'll know all about it some day!"

Beryl shook her head and did not believe that she would. That any one should run away from Dudley was a fact beyond her comprehension. She would lie for hours on the lawn by the old weir trying to puzzle it all out. Sometimes she thought that she hated Daphne. And what had she done to Dudley that he did not answer her letters? Beryl remembered the old days in Cornwall and wondered if they would ever come again.

"I don't want to understand it, Romer," she said pugnaciously; "I don't want to understand anything! He's gone away, and he hates us all, and we're no better—than trees!" she burst out, with one of her splendid similes. "And it's all Daphne—you know it is! Don't you wish she was a man—or should it be 'were'? If I could hate her, how glad I'd be!"

She could not hate Daphne; she remembered her with love. Romer, on his part, guessed something of the truth. He imagined Daphne had left his uncle because of some story of Hermione's death. He would have done much to help the lonely man had chance offered him the opportunity; but it delayed to come. The idle hours at Sonning Court began to weary him, and when he heard of Dudley's

activity he would have given much to share it. Shrewd enough, he imagined that all this smoke of gossip could not be without fire. Dudley was treading a perilous way. Romer dreaded a fall, though he knew not by what catastrophe it would be brought about. He was never more pleased in his life than when, on coming down to the breakfast table upon the second day of September, he found a letter from old Pat Foxall asking him to go to Paris without delay. "For your uncle's sake," old Pat concluded, "lose no time. There is that going on here which may save or ruin him."

Romer took the morning train to London and was in Paris before midnight.

He had looked to find the Irishman at the Gare du Nord to meet him, but no one that he knew was there; and he was about to take a cab to the Ritz Hotel, when a burly Frenchman stepped into the vehicle he had engaged and refused to budge an inch. Romer laughed at his impudence and began to wonder if it were worth a scene.

"*Je ne bouge pas—je ne bouge pas!*" cried the man defiantly.

He was a typical Frenchman, with flowing iron-grey hair, a wide-brimmed felt hat, and a smart coat trimmed with astrakhan. Romer had the mind to take him by the collar and fling him to the pavement; but he remembered the Chauvinistic

partialities of the French police, and he tried to keep his temper.

"It's my cab," he argued doggedly, ignoring the fact that the man spoke French. "For two pins I'd throw you——"

"Into the gutter, faith! Come in, me bhoy—it's no time to be treading on the tail of me coat!"

Romer got into the cab without a word. He had common sense enough to understand that Patrick Foxall had some object for this amazing humour. Not until they were rattling over the *pavé* of the busy streets by the station did he confess his astonishment.

"Pat, by all that's unholy!" he said, slapping the wild Irishman affectionately upon the thigh. "If I hadn't been a chump, I'd have known it. What's up now, Pat? Is it bailiffs or females? You look like the roaring lion of Sadis! What's it mean, old chap?"

Patrick, relieved to have left the station behind him, took off his hat and showed a flowing wig of iron-grey curly hair. His manner was unusually earnest; but he had lost none of his spirits.

"Molinard's me name," said he, "and Victor was I christened in my baptism. There's a great deal up, young sir—your uncle's safety, for one thing. I'm glad to have you in Paris, Romer. It's no coward I am, Heaven knows; but there are

times when a man counts the number of his friends. This night's one of them."

He took a cigar-case from his pocket, and when both were smoking, he began to tell a quick story.

"Romer," he said, "ye'll have heard how your Aunt Hermione died?"

"I know something of it, Pat; not much. She was found dead in her boudoir, and they said it was heart disease, I remember."

"Aye, they said more than that! Trust your friends to be first in lying about you."

"I know what you mean, Pat; you mean that people talked about my uncle. They said he was unkind to her."

"It's gospel truth—they said that he killed her."

"I wish I could come across the man who said it—he wouldn't be in voice to-morrow, Pat!"

"That's a luxury you won't enjoy, Master Battle-axe. Malice speaks with a cloak about its face, let me tell you. You'd chase a shadow. I've been at work night and day for the month past chasing those same shadows—but thank God I've nailed one to the wall at last!"

Romer apologized for laughing at old Pat.

"Go on, Pat," he said; "I won't tell it at the Club. I'm sure it's no joke that brought me to Paris to-night, anyway!"

"Indeed and 'tis not, Romer. 'Twill need something more than an Irishman's wild talk to do the work that's to be done in this city between now and to-morrow night."

He was silent for a spell, and then he asked suddenly—

"Did it ever occur to you, Romer, why your uncle's valet left him?"

"I can't say that it did."

"And you didn't know that your Aunt Hermione was always against him?"

"I knew she never liked him."

"Ah!—she never liked him! True as sin—she couldn't abide him! Dudley told me as much the last time I saw him. And yet—mark this, my lad!—'twas Courvoisier that came first to your uncle's help on the night Hermione died!"

"Good Lord, Pat! I never thought of that!"

"If I could say the same, 'twould not be so many sleepless nights I'd know. He was the first down, let me tell you, and the quickest to the doctor. His blarney carries your uncle to Cornwall and tries to keep him there! There's another marriage talked of, and what follows? Courvoisier gives notice. Shall I tell you why? Because, as heaven's above me, I believed he murdered your aunt!"

Romer had seen a good deal of the world for a lad of his age, but little of its tragedies. This

unmeasured accusation both excited and unnerved him. He did not know what to say. Patrick, he thought, must have imagined half of it.

"If you believe that, Pat, why don't you charge the man? You owe it to Dudley. You should arrest him at once."

Old Pat smiled at his simplicity.

"'Tis an innocent kind of a fox ye are altogether, Romer. What would be the good of arresting him until I had the proof in my hand? He'd laugh over the damages a court would give him. I should be called an interfering old fool for the trouble. No, I'll just wait like a sane man. Let him give me the half of a chance, and I'll have him in prison in twenty hours. I'm in Paris to get it—that's what brought me here."

"Then he's in Paris, too?"

"As sure as the judgment. He's in Paris; he arrived yesterday, and what do you think it's for, now?"

"I'm no good at riddles, Pat."

"How if it should be to sell jewels?"

"Jewels! whose jewels!"

"The Lady Hermione's."

"Do you believe he stole them, then?"

"If I did not, should I be wearing this hat? 'Tis rubies he has to sell, and, mark you, rubies your aunt wore on the night of her death. I'm sure of it

as far as mortal man can be sure. What's more, I'll buy those stones to-morrow night, Romer."

"You——?"

"No other. Ah! young gentleman, 'tis useful sometimes to have been a rolling stone which takes a glass with Moss—bad cess to him! If there's anything they can teach me about the selling of stolen jewels in Paris, I'm a Dutchman and not born in honest County Cork! Believe it, I know every blackguard buyer in the whole city; there's not a decent 'fence' in Paris that I haven't met in honourable agreement one of these days or the other. 'Tis these men that wrote to London for me, at my prompting, telling your uncle's valet that if any friends of his had jewels to sell, one Victor Molinard was to be trusted and would buy them. They wrote through one of Courvoisier's pals. Romer, I paid five hundred sovereigns to have that letter written. To-morrow night I'll tell you if it was worth the money. 'Twill be when Courvoisier think's he's dealing with Victor Molinard, that buys stolen rubies and asks no questions. I'd give something to see his face when he finds out that this same gentleman is just old Pat Foxall—God bless him!"

"And you are going to meet Courvoisier face to face, Pat?"

"'Tis truth that I am. To-morrow at seven

o'clock in the Rue Marbeau. You'll come with me, bhoy. St. Patrick be praised that you got me letter!"

Romer said nothing. He had come to realize how that his journey to Paris might save his uncle's honour, perhaps his life. This, then, had been Dudley's trouble in the dark months. Romer was very sorry for his uncle that night; he regretted that he had left him so much alone in the bygone months. The excitement of to-day was like wine to him. He determined already that, whatever the cost might be, he would trace this dark mystery to its source.

* * * * *

Romer spent the night at the Ritz Hotel, having left old Pat in the cab at the door. He did not see the Irishman on the following morning, nor again until they met at the Café Joncereau, at six o'clock, as it was agreed. That they were about to embark upon a highly dangerous undertaking was plain to Romer from the first. He understood Pat's desire to remain hidden from such friends as he numbered in Paris.

"Courvoisier is lodging in the Rue Marbeau," Pat had said. "I shall go to him as Victor Molinard, the receiver. If he discovers who I am, 'tis likely I must run for it. But I speak French like

an Irishman," he remarked sapiently; "and I doubt if 'tis Courvoisier that will deal. He was not on your uncle's yacht when she was in the Solent; and he's never seen me but twice in his life. We'll take the risk, lad; we'll not turn back, for Dudley's sake. I know that you'll say 'Yes' to that."

The question was superfluous. Romer's impatience would have worked a mischief had not Pat controlled it. All that day he wandered aimlessly about the streets of Paris like one who resented the hours between him and a night of pleasure. Six o'clock had scarcely struck before he entered the Café Joncereau and found Patrick sipping absinth at a marble table. They met as casual acquaintances. The peril they were to face was scarcely named. In the cab which carried them to the Rue Marbeau, Patrick spoke of it as of the commonest adventure. But he knew, none the less, that it might cost him his life.

"'Tis simple as A B C," he said, while he buttoned his coat with nervous fingers and forgot, in his excitement, even to smoke.

"I shall go to the house, and whoever sees me will put down the rubies. If it's Courvoisier, the trick's done; I shall refuse his price and leave. If it's not Courvoisier, I shall act as the opportunity serves. You'll stand in the street like a watch-dog,

me bhoy. Don't be too far away ; and if I whistle, come in—with the police, if you think best."

Romer could see the gravity of it and, little as he liked his part, he feared there was no other.

" It would give the show away, I suppose," he said, " if I came in with you, Pat ? "

" There wouldn't be a rag of it left, young gentleman ! I must go alone this night. I must go, for me friend's sake. But you will not desert me—faith, you won't ! There's no man in Europe I'd so soon have with me, Romer ! "

The cab stopped with a jolt at the corner of the Rue Marbeau almost as he spoke, and without any further word upon it Patrick stepped nimbly to the pavement. It was almost seven o'clock then ; the first gloom of twilight already darkened the shabby street. Romer saw that it was one of those narrow thoroughfares with immensely large houses which bordered upon the Gare du Nord. By here and there a low *brasserie* gathered harvest from workmen returning from the railway. Of the shops, many had no windows, for their owners sold carriages and there was *garage* for motor-cars. In a way, the Rue Marbeau had a character of its own—it was neither a slum nor a suburban thoroughfare, but a lofty, narrow street, alternately speaking of sufficiency and poverty. Romer, in truth, could learn nothing from it, nor did his anxious impatience

permit any second inference. He was telling himself all the time that old Pat Foxall risked his life for a friend's sake.

"I wish I could come with you, Pat," he repeated for the tenth time; and for the tenth time Pat would not hear him.

"It's No. 7," he said nonchalantly. "Don't let anybody see you loitering. Walk as though you had business here. I know you'll stand by me, Romer!"

He squeezed his hand and turned away. Instinctively Romer's fingers closed upon the good pistol in the pocket of his light grey coat. He did not move until Patrick had disappeared into the carriage-builder's shop some eight doors from him. Then at his leisure he walked down the street.

Let us follow the Irishman while he enters that shop and asks, as it had been arranged by letter, for Paul Dufayel. By such a name, he believed, had Courvoisier, the valet, written to him from London.

Ostensibly a carriage-builder's shop, there was but one shabby motor-car in the show-room upon the ground floor; and when Patrick entered, he could not attract attention, nor did he see any bell. A dirty wooden office at the far end of the shop showed a single electric lamp—but there were neither books nor letters upon its crazy desk.

Patrick observed a loose door upon the right hand side of the office and a flight of narrow, tortuous steps. And when he had waited a little while and no one answered his knock, he climbed the stairs and found himself upon a cramped landing to which the daylight came through a starred skylight of frosted glass. It was plain to him by this time that whoever had named the house for the rendezvous did not live there, but used it for his own security. His suspicion of Courvoisier gained conviction while he stood. This man, who had written to him in the name of Paul Dufayel, would not deal openly, then, even with a notorious friend of thieves. Such a disinclination was of itself a proof of something more than common guilt. Even the lowest of the criminals of Paris bartered freely with Victor Molinard, the receiver of their dangerous spoil. But Courvoisier appointed another's house for the rendezvous; he came under another's name.

All this passed through Patrick's mind like a flash while he stood upon the landing and knocked at a bare wooden door to which the stairs conducted him. He expected to meet Courvoisier face to face, but in this he was greatly mistaken, for when the door opened, a woman answered him, and he concluded at once that it was the same woman who had tried to blackmail Dudley in Charles Street, Berkeley Square. Her appearance, her manner, her

voice justified that conclusion. The same black Spanish mantilla was wrapped about her face ; she wore the black dress of which Dudley had spoken ; her French was excellent, without flaw or accent. The surprise staggered the Irishman. He had not schemed for this.

" Monsieur Molinard ? " she exclaimed, with a curious look at once of suspicion and of pleasure. " You are expecting my husband, Paul Dufayel, I think ? "

Patrick bowed with a great air of gallantry, and answered with all assurance—

" Madame, the expectation was less than the pleasure of this surprise. Tell me that your husband will be very late."

Again she looked at him with a quick, searching glance which betrayed a woman's doubt.

" My husband will not come at all ; he is detained in—Rome," she said bluntly, with just an accent upon the word. " Not that it matters at all. I am here to act for him, Monsieur Molinard."

" He is very good to me, madame, your husband. It will be a protracted business, I hope."

" I trust not—pray come in. We can be alone here."

She entered a little room upon the first floor of the house and closed the door. Scarcely had she done so, when two men came stealthily from the

staircase above and waited upon the landing as though for some signal which the woman would make to them. Patrick, meanwhile, was quite at his ease. He knew how to manage a woman well enough.

"I owe something to the antiquities of Rome," he exclaimed, with the fine air of the schooled gallant. "Your husband is a great traveller, madame?"

"Sometimes, monsieur."

"He likes new scenes, when a city becomes unhealthy!"

He whispered it in her ear. It was such a signal as one rogue might make to another—a Masonic-like pass to a good understanding between thieves. She did not misunderstand it, and laughed with him. Her voice was unpleasant and harsh. Patrick imagined she had known much trouble.

"If you like, unhealthy—as unhealthy as this poor room, Monsieur Molinard. Come, won't you sit down?"

She indicated a cane chair with a torn seat. The room was shabby enough, and its one window gave out upon a bare brick wall. The furniture scarcely suggested permanent habitation. The table was littered with the remains of a hasty meal. A sofa and three chairs completed the ornament. When Patrick sat down, he could observe the woman

more clearly. He had begun to ask himself already where and under what circumstances he had seen her before.

"Madame," he said, "the room could not be better. I go into many like it in Paris. Sometimes I carry pretty things away. In that case, I leave pretty things behind me. But I have a treacherous memory, madame. I can never recollect my friend's name when I have left his house. Pity me and say that I am foolish."

The woman put her elbow on the table and almost peered into his face.

"I will tell you that by and by," she said, with some meaning. "You are fond of pretty things, are you not, monsieur?"

"Incurably fond, madame."

"And you have your preferences?"

"Certainly I have."

"They would be for——"

"Pretty women, madame—Nature's jewels!"

"Costly treasures, monsieur."

"Madame, I observe that you know the sex. Why should we complain? We do not value that which costs us nothing. I blame woman for her sweet reasonableness. Whatever she costs us, we should pay the price."

"In ready money—did you say?"

"In ready money, exactly."

"For the treasures she has garnered?"

"For the gold of her hair, the pearls of her teeth, the sapphires of her eyes, the rubies of her lips. I am very fond of rubies, Madame Dufayel."

She laughed softly. The men, listening at the door, stooped to hear every word. When Patrick said "rubies," one nudged the other. In the room, the two fenced with words like skilled exponents of the subtlest art.

"Being very fond of rubies, you buy them sometimes, Monsieur Molinard?"

"Whenever I can find them, madame."

"At a man's price?"

"When a man is vendor—yes."

"But when a woman?"

"I pay folly its tribute."

She paused a minute and then she asked suddenly—

"Why did you come here, to-night?"

"I have told you—to pay folly its tribute."

"Ah! then you look for rubies in this house?"

"Pearls are found in deep places, madame."

"And rubies——"

"In the lace about your throat, madame."

The shrewd guess startled the woman and brought her hand swiftly to her throat. For a moment she appeared almost to cry out; but she mastered herself and answered with studied calm—

"There are no rubies there, Monsieur Molinard."

"I beg your pardon, Madame *Courvoisier*, there is a whole string of them in the place I have indicated."

She stood up in affright when he named her truly, and he, giving her no time to spring a surprise upon him, stood also and spoke with great rapidity —but still in French—

"Come," he said, "we know each other. I perceived that five minutes ago. You recognised me when I entered, madame. I named you when you put your hand to your throat. You are the Frenchwoman, Georgette de la Mousse, who left Vienna in some haste three—let me see—three years ago, under suspicion in the affair of the Chevalier Zizka. Twelve months later—but why should we call up the past? We must be friends, madame; it would be absurd if we were anything else."

He spoke like a man who stakes all upon a single throw, in quick, brief periods, each of which had its purpose. From the first it had been apparent that this woman penetrated his disguise. She must have seen him in London, perhaps in Charles Street. His French betrayed him, good as it was. She had come to Paris upon a twofold mission, he concluded —to sell the jewels if Molinard were what he pretended to be, or to identify him if he were a spy upon her. Foxall was convinced that she had men with

her in the house. He understood that the situation was greatly dangerous. Her very ardour of contradiction betrayed her.

"What do you mean?" was her angry protest. "I have never been in Vienna—I don't know of the Chevalier Zizka!"

"And yet you have his name to perfection, madame. Oh! I compliment you. The Hungarian accent is charming. Don't imagine that you will frighten me! Your friends are outside?—yes, I have observed that. Has it occurred to you, madame, that I also have friends outside?"

He raised his voice with a deliberate purpose, for he quite understood that others were listening. The men upon the landing, hearing every word that was spoken, looked at one another for an instant, and then made some signal to the shop below. Upon this a man ran out into the street and began to draw down the iron shutter which closed the *garage* in. Madame Courvoisier's design was to discover if the police had come with the Irishman.

"Your friends need not suffer any anxieties," she said, with a hard laugh, while the hand at her throat closed about the stolen jewels. "You were very foolish to interfere, Mr. Foxall. What did you hope to gain? Did you think I should be so blind as not to recognize you? You can prove nothing against me—nothing, nothing!"

She turned upon him defiantly, like one who thought that the mere denial would settle it. Patrick was quite aware what her vehemence implied. This was not the first time that he had brought an angry woman to bay. He believed that it was a game in which he had few rivals.

"It will be necessary to speak of proof, madame, when you compel me. I trust it will not come to that. There are other ways. One of them is a safe way. I point that out first, madame. It would be a great misfortune if I were compelled to go to your husband and to say that Georgette de la Mousse——"

She stifled a cry and took one step towards the door. The threat frightened her as nothing else in their interview. It was plain to Foxall that Courvoisier knew nothing of his wife's story.

"Come," he said quickly, "be reasonable, madame. I say there is an alternative. Why should we not act together? You lose nothing and may gain much. I shall go to England and forget that we have met. Being wise, you will remain in Paris or any city which is not unhealthy. London is not safe, madame. There are inquisitive people there who will ask where you got those jewels. If I tell them that they were stolen by a certain valet to a friend of mine——"

She cut him short with an oath of defiance. Her

natural prudence did not withstand his knowledge of her true name and history. At whatever cost, she argued, this man must not leave the Rue Marbeau alive. The hour for compromise was passed. She flung the door open and summoned her friends.

"You shall tell nothing, monsieur!"

Foxall stood quite still, believing that he had lost the throw. He was a man of courage, but the danger might have appalled the bravest. There, in that lonely house, whence no cry could go out, face to face with the thieves of the city, his life did not seem worth a moment's purchase. But he would sell it dearly none the less. His back was to the wall. The fighting instincts of ten generations of Irishmen fired his blood and nerved his hand.

"Indeed, madame, I shall tell much," he said, with ironical calmness. "Pray let these gentlemen come in. I am very glad to see them."

She cowered back, for he was at no pains to conceal the revolver in his hand. The door was now wide open, and a man sprang out of the darkness of the corridor, and lifting an iron bar, he aimed a terrible blow at the defiant figure. Patrick leaped aside lightly and hurled a chair at the man's legs. He would not shoot if he could help it, and the ruse served him more cleverly, for the man fell headlong and lay stunned and bruised by his own impetuosity.

"One of you!" roared Patrick, as he stepped over the prone figure and, pushing the woman aside, made boldly for the staircase. He had looked to find others at the door; and he found them, but not according to his guess. For a man lay huddled upon the floor, and above him stood Romer Hatton, no more concerned than a boxer at an academy.

"Are you safe, Pat—are you safe, old man? Then down you come! The whole place is full of them."

Patrick followed him blindly down the broken staircase. He saw that the iron shutters of the shop were lowered and that men guarded the outer door.

* * * * *

Romer had obeyed Patrick very faithfully in his injunction not to be seen loitering in the street. For some minutes he did not enter the Rue Marbeau at all, but strolled through neighbouring thoroughfares, here noting a busy *café*, there some odd scene typical of Parisian life. In the porch of the church of S. Vincent de Paul a flower-girl stopped him and offered her roses. The piquant foreign face appealed to an English sentiment; he bought a single white rose of her and gave her a couple of francs. It was amusing to talk bad French to such a pretty

creature ; and he had become quite eloquent, when he recollected old Pat and left her abruptly. Like some sentinel guilty of sleep, he remembered Pat's necessity and hurried to the rendezvous. When he regained the Rue Marbeau, he found that melancholy street at the nadir of its gloom. The shops were closed by this time; a drizzle of rain sent the workmen from the marble tables to the shelter of the *cafés*. No. 7, the house which old Pat had entered, did not show a single light at its windows ; nor was there any tenant of its shabby *garage*. Romer passed it twice and fell to wondering what was happening to Patrick. He blamed himself a little that he had not insisted upon going up. An Englishman's goodly instinct for the pleasantries of a brawl caused him some self-reproach. If Patrick had made some excuse, they might have gone up together, and none of the fun would have been lost. He blamed the Irishman for his selfish instincts. In truth, he fretted at the *rôle*, an ignominious *rôle*, which his friend compelled him to play, and was almost tempted to return and buy another rose of the pretty flower-girl. The number of times he crossed the end of the Rue Marbeau, or measured its length, or looked up at the unlighted house, deducted from the sum of his general calculations, would have made a pretty series for an examination paper, he thought. There were inter-

vals when he came to the conclusion that he had missed Patrick and had better go back to the Ritz Hotel; other resolutions which prompted him to enter the house and learn the truth. The difficulty was a nice one, and he was in all the throes of it when an incident occurred which changed the current of his thoughts instantly and brought his mind to its best activity. For what should happen but that, as he was standing in the shadows of a doorway, almost opposite the unlighted house, he beheld a man come out of No. 7 and begin to draw down the iron shutters of the shop. Not only this, but when the shutter had fallen with a loud clang, and only the wicket remained open, the man looked stealthily up and down the street, and as though to make more certain, crossed the road and opened the door of a neighbouring *brasserie*. It was a natural proceeding, to be passed by without remark at any other time; but Romer, slow to act upon his ideas in the common affairs of life, jumped instantly this night to a conclusion; and without a second thought or any question of his own safety, he slipped across the road and entered the shop by the open wicket. Scarcely was he inside when the man returned and, again looking up and down the street, entered the shop at last and closed the aperture behind him. The two now stood so close together in the gloom of the half-lighted show-room that Romer could

almost feel the man's breath upon his cheek; but he neither moved nor breathed, and the man passed on, and opening a wooden door upon his left hand, he disappeared from the place.

It was a fine moment, a moment when hesitation might have undone all; when one false step, one slip or stumble might have brought out that gang which plainly were harboured in the dismal house. Romer could hear the voices of men in some room below. The walls about him were but lath and plaster, which would betray the slightest sound. Never in his life had he been called upon so to exercise his judgment or to scheme for a friend's safety. How should he act, what course pursue? Should he rest there in the shadows of the shop, or, braving another step, seek the rooms above, where Patrick, it might be, was in danger of his life? Without a doubt upon it, he took the bolder course, and crossing the flags, he mounted the winding stair by the little office. It was almost dark here, for a poor lamp cast but feeble rays upwards; and when he gained the stairhead, he stood in black darkness. There were men in this place, too; Romer could hear their mutterings and whispers. If they were unconscious of his presence, he set it down to the occupation which engrossed them. For they were listening intently to the shrill voice of a woman who cried: "You shall tell nothing, monsieur!" And

this was the oddest chance of the night, that at the very moment when Romer came out upon the landing, Courvoisier's wife cast down the glove and flung open the door that her friends might deal with Patrick Foxall. Standing one moment in utter darkness, Romer was in a blaze of light the next. He saw old Patrick defiant in the room; he saw the angry woman, her hands clasped nervously to her throat; he saw the men, one springing in upon old Pat, the other about to follow him. And then, without a question or a scruple, he struck at the face nearest to him. The blow which felled the Frenchman would have stunned an ox. The man went to the floor with a low groan; the friends were shoulder to shoulder at last.

"Are you safe, Pat—are you safe, old man?"

Pat answered in a voice of thunder—

"Faith, and I am! Where is it, lad—which way?"

"Downstairs and be d——d to them, Pat! We'll find a road!"

They half fell down the stairs and stood in the ill-lighted shop. The lamp still burned in the office and showed them the distant figures of three men who guarded the outer door. Blind flight might have carried them to this iron shutter and the impotent struggle against it. But there was another factor. While they stood for an instant, breathing

quickly, searching hither and thither for another way, the wooden door through which the man had disappeared when Romer entered the shop opened suddenly, and a bright light shone out upon the faces of the men. Romer turned quickly and beheld the girl whom he had spoken to in the neighbouring street. She was white with terror; but he understood the signal that she made to him, and pulling old Pat by the arm, he dragged him through the door. The girl was waiting for him upon the other side.

"Lock the door, monsieur!" she cried wildly; "please be quick!"

Patrick shot the heavy bolt and cast one quick glance about him. They were in a wooden-walled room, with a great trap-door occupying half its floor. The men behind them already beat heavily upon the frail partition. It was life or death, the spin of a coin, a young girl's honesty or her lie.

"Follow me!" the child said; "I will show you!"

She disappeared down the narrow stairs of the trap and was lost in the darkness of some cellar below. Without a second thought Romer followed her to the depths. He had made up his mind already. She was to be trusted.

"Come on, Pat," he said; "the girl's a friend, I'll swear it!"

Pat lumbered down the stairs, for once trusting a young man's judgment. The scene below was in no way reassuring.

A great bare cellar, lighted in the distance by a single gas lamp, showed them a loom of walls and crates and iron rubble, but it did not show them any door. In cooler moments they would have drawn back from such a refuge, as from a trap which no child would enter; but it was all or nothing now, the fidelity of their guide or the desperate *lutte pour la vie* in the shop above. Neither spoke his thoughts, but each made his intention clear. They would chance it, pinning their faith to this little waif of the streets who had come upon their path so miraculously. It was just a case wherein a sober judgment might have undone all; but they clutched at that straw of trust, and it proved their salvation. The very familiarity which the girl showed with this cavern-like retreat in itself did not a little to inspire their confidence; for she passed through the cellar as upon the wings of the wind. The darkness could not mislead her. Every stone was familiar to her; she knew every turn of that horrid labyrinth. When she stopped at last, it was before an iron grating, barred and padlocked and forbidding passage. The men would have said then that it was a trap but for the keys which glittered in the dim light. She had the keys,

this little miracle! She knew that they would doubt.

"There is a passage, messieurs—Café Marbeau —Ah! they are coming down, they are coming down!"

Romer stood to listen and heard a low crash—the bursting in of the frail partition in the rooms behind them. Beyond the grating he saw a bricked tunnel, low and dark and covered with fungus. The girl fumbled with the keys in the padlock, but could not lift the rusted tumblers. Steps were audible on the flags about them, the heavy breathing of silent men.

"Give me the keys," he said quietly; "I think I can do it."

Patrick Foxall said nothing. The girl pressed a hand to her heart and seemed to count the seconds. Romer had already one of the padlocks opened, when a hand thrust itself out of the shadows and dragged him backwards; but he turned with an athlete's quickness and closed with his unseen antagonist in a grip of iron. Others from the room above, coming headlong, flung themselves upon old Pat and went down with him to the floor. Patrick knew little of that which he did to them; but he remembered rising twice and whirling his stick like the good shillelagh it was; while at other moments he beheld men striking at him with their knives,

or heard cries when his ebony fell like a bludgeon upon a human board. In the end, the horrible faces and the bleared eyes drew back from him—a pistol flashed; he knew that Romer was calling him.

"Up with you, Pat—up with you, my veteran! It's ninepins over here, man—are you hurt, old Pat?"

Patrick staggered to his feet—he had a burning wound in his shoulder, and his hands were cut and bleeding. But he cared nothing for that. The scene about him was worth a man's life to see. Aye, he could have cried aloud for joy of that splendid rout, that young lad's victory. For there were the swarming rogues, and there was Romer, and it was one against ten, and the ten were reeling back. That clear young voice ringing out in the darkness had the music of a hunting morning. For Romer was crying "Gown, gown!" as in his Cambridge days. Like some new figure of a fighting age, he swung a pistol for battle-axe and drove the good blows home. And old Pat has the catch of it, too, and together, persistently, heroically, they make upward for the haven. The gate forbids no longer —in the confusion of that *mêlée* the girl has snatched the keys and the door is opened. Hers is the hand which helps Romer up—hers the cry that his friend will hasten. Old Patrick does not hear it.

He is firing a volley point blank at the grinning faces before him.

"To the devil with you, blackguards!"

They reeled away from him, shielding their blinded eyes; and while they reeled, the girl turned the key in the lock and said they were saved.

* * * * *

The tunnel led them across the street to the cellars of the Café Marbeau. Ten years ago the proprietor of the *café* had linked his houses thus and stored his wine in the caves below the street. But the hotel upon this side had failed, and the *café* upon the other remained. If those within it were surprised to see Englishmen come suddenly from the kitchens of their house, they had no opportunity to gratify their curiosity and question them; for the three strode to the door without a word and were in the street before any man had recovered from his surprise.

Their first words were to the girl who had saved them.

"Who are you, child—what is your name?" Pat asked, with all the kindness he could command.

"I am Bibi Gardescu, monsieur."

"How did you get in that house?"

"My brother Georges works there—but he was not there to-night," she added quickly, with an obvious lie to shield him.

"We do not want to know anything about that. Who keeps the house, whose is it?"

"Please it belongs to Maître Blaireau, the carriage-builder."

"Ho, ho! and a fine business he must do! You cannot go back there, Bibi. Where do you live?"

"Anywhere, monsieur. Oh! it doesn't matter; I am used to it. I shall sleep on the porch of the Trinity to-night."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, little girl. Do you know what these are, Bibi?"

He pulled a handful of gold pieces from his pocket and showed them to the astonished child. Her eyes glittered with the covetousness of the born waif, who knew neither right nor wrong and got her bread wherever she could snatch it.

"Oh! if I know, monsieur! Those are twenty-franc pieces!"

"Exactly. You will come to-morrow to the Hôtel Ritz—you know that, little girl?"

Both her hands closed about the money; she did not take her eyes off it when she answered—

"Yes, yes; it is Place Vendôme, monsieur."

"You will come to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, and there will be more gold pieces, Bibi; you understand?"

She said "Yes, yes," and looking at Romer archly for a moment, she kissed his hand suddenly

and then ran like a deer away into the darkness. She was frightened that they would ask for the money back again. They never saw Bibi again.

"It is just a little born thief that was taken by your handsome figure, Romer," said Pat, and added: "'Tis lucky enough that I brought you with me!"

He began to hurry on, pressing a hand to his shoulder and labouring in his walk. Romer had been too excited to speak a word until this time, but something in old Pat's manner startled him and he turned to look at his friend.

"You are hurt, Pat—there's blood on your coat!"

"A mere scratch, me bhoy, that five minutes with the wash-tub will be curing. Faith, we've no time to think of ourselves. We have work to do, Romer, lad!"

He beckoned to a passing cab and brought the man to the pavement. For once in his life Patrick Foxall consented to be helped in.

"I'll see a doctor to oblige you," he said, in a faint voice. "Hôtel Ritz, and ten francs if you hurry!" he cried up to the driver.

The cab went like a fire-engine.

CHAPTER XXIII

PATRICK IS A PROPHET

IT was late upon the following morning when Romer, dreaming of a 'Varsity course, in which No. 4 hit him persistently on the back with his oar, woke up at last to realize that some one was knocking upon his bedroom door. He did not know what time it was, nor could he remember precisely what he had been doing last night, but the robust voice of old Pat, clamouring for admittance, recalled the scene in its bald outline and sent him from his bed with eager steps. When he opened the door, he discovered old Pat already dressed and not less ready for self-approving confidences than he was himself.

"The top of the morning, me bhoy! 'Tis the next train to London we are to catch—if there is one. Faith! the Seven Sleepers ye are, and all rolled into one! How goes it, young gentleman—how's the temperature this day?"

Romer sat down in a big arm-chair and rubbed his back ruefully.

"I'm as stiff as a plaster figure, Pat. I believe some one's been opening my back to see what it's made of. One of those chaps must have got in a swinger! I did not feel it at the time."

"The dirty dogs! 'Tis me likewise that they've been performing operations upon! I don't hear ye asking after my health, Romer, young sir."

Romer was contrite. Pat looked so absurdly healthy.

"Ah! I'd forgotten your shoulder, Pat. Observe the primitive beast. It was a nasty cut, old chap! Are you going to see the sawbones this morning?"

"He'll do himself the honour to take twenty francs off me at eleven o'clock precisely. To the divil with the lot of them, say I! A bit of good lint and a cooling lotion is worth the whole pack! Will you be coming down, Romer? There's a bite and sup I've ordered, and a bottle of the ould vinegar to wash it down. Can you dress yourself, lad?"

Romer said that he could. His back was black and blue, and those, he remembered, were the colours of Caius, and exceedingly effective in feminine toilets.

"It will do for a blazer, Patrick," he suggested.

"I'm obliged for the tattooing; but it's on the wrong side to be effective. I suppose your next train means the night mail to town?"

"Indeed and it does, and no time to be lost, either! Here's yesterday's papers from London, and a pretty story they tell. If I did not know him, I'd say your uncle had lost his wits. Read that, my lad, and ask yourself what's coming to Dudley."

He conjured up a copy of a London daily paper from his capacious pocket and tossed it into the chair in which the younger man sat. Romer saw at once that the third column on the front page was entirely devoted to a graphic account of the strike on the Great Southern Railway. One of its headlines was ominous—it spoke of a conspiracy against the life of Dudley Hatton. In the text itself there was a fuller explanation. Affairs, it said, had come to a crisis on this once prosperous railway. The men had been very patient; but all their demands, many of them admittedly just, were not even debated by a stubborn Board; and of this Board, Dudley Hatton, the creator of that magnificent enterprise, was indisputably master. The guinea-pigs, the titled drones, had neither capacity nor authority. The beaten, angry men knew that their fortunes were in one man's hand, and that by one man must their salvation come.

Six months ago they believed him to be a just leader, a generous chief, the welcome arbiter of dispute; but that day was forgotten, and he who had been their friend they reckoned now supreme amongst the enemies of their honest demands. The fanatical denounced him in no measured terms; the sober railway world made nothing of his point of view; the women, the mothers of the children, cursed the very name which once they had applauded. Driven to the last point as the engineers were, starving, beaten, it was no surprise that outrage followed the pitiable deadlock. The goods-yard in Lower Kennington Lane—built at a cost of many thousands not a year ago—had been burnt to the ground by hot-headed rioters. There had been stormy meetings of the railway's *employés* in Lambeth and Vauxhall. The local traffic was almost entirely suspended; the expresses ran with difficulty. Crowning all was the attempt upon Dudley's life to which the headlines referred so ominously. He had been shot at on the platform at Kennington Station three days ago, the report said, but happily had come to no harm, while the would-be assassin escaped in the press of men. The police feared that this was but an omen of grave days to come. They held to the theory that certain unknown agents were deliberately inciting the men to violence.

Romer read this alarming report and then laid the paper down as one who had not the will to hear more.

"What, in Heaven's name, does it all mean, Pat?" he asked bewilderedly. He could make nothing of it—he refused stoutly to believe that Dudley could act in a way unworthy of his generous nature and noble intellect.

Old Patrick was scarcely wiser. He lighted a cigarette, and sitting upon the edge of the bed, he admitted that he could only guess the meaning.

"Faith! 'tis a case to puzzle the ould divil himself! Either this paper lies, or Dudley's gone stark staring mad! I'm off to England this day to find out which. 'Tis not the man he is—ye know it yourself—to be denying honest folk their rights, or treating with railway servants like a woman at an argle-bargle. There's mischief brewing; and I've a shrewd notion who stirs the pot! Woman's the root of all evil, as our godfathers and godmothers taught us in our baptism, Romer, young sir. I haven't the shadow of a doubt that your little Cambridge lady could tell us more about this than any man alive! She didn't trust one of the best fellows that ever drew breath, and here's the consequence: he's running amuck like a bull in a china shop; and who knows where 'twill end, Romer—who knows, me lad?"

It was foreign to Patrick Foxall to entertain the gravities of life; but this morning found him amazingly serious and thoughtful. His shrewd brain had wrestled with the problem of Dudley's embarrassments until it was weary and perplexed. He could see no light, scarce dared to hope for any betterment. The lad with him was like a child before such deep problems; he could but observe the most elementary facts.

"They had a quarrel, Pat, the very night after they were engaged; I know that much. If she'd make it up with him, he'd be a changed man; I'm sure of it. The question is, Will she make it up? Little Beryl said that she left a letter for Dudley at Sonning. Whether he got it or not, I don't know. I think it was sent on to London."

Patrick stared at him as though he spoke of wonders.

"A letter—from the girl! and you didn't forward it?"

"I didn't think about it, Pat!"

"A plague on your woolly head, then! Man, didn't you see the importance of it?"

"Well, I thought——"

"To blazes with your thoughts! Don't you see that if she offered to come back to him, it would have saved him from this? Man, are ye a block—are ye a baby?"

He sprang up from his seat and began to stride up and down the room like one who wrestles with his own anger. Romer did not dare to contradict him in face of his passion. After all, he imagined that he had had some responsibility in the matter, of the letter. He remembered speaking to Spiler the butler, about it, and asking why it had not been posted. Spiler said that his master was expected to return every day; and Romer confessed that, henceforth, he forgot all about the matter. Pat was very right to reproach him; he had been unwise.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap!" he stammered; "of course it was idiotic! If it's at Park Lane, I'll see that Dudley gets it next post."

"Ye'll see—ye'll see! 'Tis as easy as shelling peas, then! Ye'll post the letter——!" He stopped dramatically and pointed his finger. "Aye, what address will ye write, then? Where's Dudley this minute? Who knows? Who's seen him this fortnight past? Does it dawn upon you that he's hiding from his friends, maybe? Ye'll post it—bow-wow!"

Romer did not say a single word. It was news to him that his uncle had quitted Park Lane. True, he remembered how casual had been the news of him they had received at Sonning; but this new evidence of complete isolation almost terrified

him. He would not have delayed an hour to return to London had there been a train. The night mail suggested the next century.

"What are we to do, Pat?" he cried fretfully. "We can't stop here; we don't know when he is in London. Is it all to be given up, then, without a try or a word?"

"I'll say no such thing. He's on the railway; the paper writes it. He's to and fro like a will-o'-the-wisp! If ye walk from London to Chichester, ye'll find him, I don't doubt! Put on your hat and be off with you. Tell him that Pat Foxall is in Paris buying the jewels which were stolen from his dead wife's neck. Tell him that those who are seeking to stir up his men against him are the servants of Beckstein and the Dutch gang that works with him. Say that in three days I'll arrest Courvoisier and bring the man to justice. Tell him that the woman he'd marry is waiting for him at Cambridge. Nothing else than that will save him this day. Go to London and make it light for him. Ye'll find him somewhere between London and Chichester, bedad!"

He fell to pacing the room once more, and for a little while his own thoughts were not to be spoken. When he turned to Romer again, it was to lay a kindly hand upon his arm and to reassure him.

"Forgive a wild man that is at his wits' end," was his apology. "Don't you see, Romer, what I suffer for him? Don't you see that it's a race between rogues and me for me friend's life? 'Tis just that! Let me go to him and say: 'Tis Courvoisier that's the rascal,' and the work's half done; but I must carry the proofs in me hands. I am waiting for them—waiting, while I count the minutes, me lad!"

"Then you think that you can still get something in Paris, Pat?"

"Think! If I've an ounce of gumption in my skull, *I'm sure!* This very day I'll buy the rubies. If I don't, book me a stall at Hanwell and see that I fill it!"

"You'll buy the rubies, Pat?"

"Faith, I will—from the woman herself."

"In the Rue Marbeau?"

"No, in the Ritz Hotel."

He had scarcely spoken the words when a valet knocked upon the door of the bedroom. Patrick turned quickly on his heel, as though he had been waiting some signal which could not fail him. When the servant entered, he took a card from the tray and handed it to Romer with a triumphant look.

It was the card of Madame Dufayel.

CHAPTER XXIV

LITTLE BERYL GOES UPON A JOURNEY

PATRICK FOXALL had pledged his reputation that he would buy the rubies which Madame Dufayel had refused to sell him in the Rue Marbeau, and this boast he redeemed. The jewels were in his bag when he quitted Paris by the night mail. He had bought them at a great price; but he knew that he would have given twice the sum without regret.

"She sold them—faith! she was wise to do it," he said, when they were away at last, upon the last stage of that journey which meant so much to their friend. "'Tis a less clever woman than Georgette de la Mousse would have seen the game was up. Faith! I know her story like a book! She's been everything under God's sun—singer, dancer, acrobat, thief! There's not a country in Europe that would not be glad to have her under lock and key! It was in Vienna where they charged her with the murder of the Chevalier

Zizka. 'Twas at Madrid I saw her arrested at the door of the National Theatre. Did I need wits to say what this woman would do when she found that London was unhealthy? Let Courvoisier buy a hat-band—bedad! he'll need it, for he'll never see his dear wife again! And I've bought more than jewels, let me tell you! I've bought that which I would not sell for five thousand pounds, Romer!"

He went on to speak of that plan they must follow in London, and of the grave issues which to-morrow would decide. Patrick was no pessimist; but he knew that if the tidings of these things did not reach Dudley Hatton before many hours had passed, they might never reach him at all. That splendid intellect had failed his friend at last. The net of Destiny had closed about him, and he struggled impotently in its meshes. But a word might bring him back to reason, might cut the bonds from his aching limbs. Patrick divined truly the fount of all that mischief. He said that Dudley Hatton believed that he was in some measure responsible for his wife's death. He would know to-morrow that he was not.

"Yes, I have the key," he persisted, in a vague strain foreign to him. "I'm on the tracks of them now, Romer; and, please God, 'tis a view halloa before many hours. We'll be in London

at seven o'clock, and then the hunt begins. Do you go to Park Lane and see if you can bring me any news of Dudley this day. I am away to the police; and a pretty story for them, too! Let it be six o'clock of the evening that we find each other again. You shall be in at the death, me lad; 'twould be unkind to deny you. I'll look for you at six o'clock, at me club, in Piccadilly, and what news of Dudley you can pick up, bring to me there. Not that I expect any, faith! 'tis no such good fortune a man may take into his account. If this mischief the newspapers speak of is true, 'twill be a miracle of a man that finds Dudley Hatton where he should look for him. But I'm hoping 'tis a writer's picture, and not more truth in it than you can expect from such a fellow!"

"I'm sure of it," said Romer with conviction. He had listened to every word, as to some oracle of salvation. This splendid friend, he was convinced, would save his Uncle Dudley. He wondered that he had not discovered Pat's sterling worth years ago.

"My uncle is not the man to be playing a silly game of hide-and-seek," he added reflectively. "If he isn't in Park Lane, the probabilities are that he's living in the Great Southern Hotel. We ought to call there first, Pat; it's ten to one we find him in the place."

"Aye, together with the stones that the gentlemen of the railway are throwing at the windows! Ye've missed the particular pleasantries, young sir. The mob is throwing stones at this same commodious fireproof hotel, just because it believes that Dudley's inside of it. Is he the one to be where the bricks are flying? Not if I know him, truly! He'll be looking on in the first place you should go to, and the last you'll think of. We must name that place before sundown to-morrow. If the picture's true, we're racing against the hours, me son, racing against the hours—and there are precious few to lose."

The confession declared an idea which had become almost a conviction. Pat did not believe that there would be any real difficulty in finding Dudley once they were in London; but it was plain to him that if the newspapers were to be believed, even a trifling delay might be fatal. His friend's desperate and illogical stand against those forces of justice and fair-dealing, to which hitherto he had submitted willingly and with generosity, might lead him also to any extremity of folly the mind could imagine. The spectacle was that of one man against five thousand. Pat knew Dudley's courage, his indomitable will, his stubborn pursuit alike of the false and the true, when the mind was set upon a purpose. He would face these men, Pat

said, and tell them to do their worst. They had already attempted his life; any hour might bring the news that another attempt had succeeded. Even Romer understood the necessity of haste.

"I'll take a cab straight to Park Lane," he said, "and after that, wire to Sonning. If they've no news of him at either house, I shall go down to Sonning in the morning and see what's to be learned. If I could take a message from Daphne, Pat, I shouldn't go in vain. It's just that or nothing, believe me. Of course, he'll be very grateful for what you've done in Paris, but even if Courvoisier is arrested, I don't see how it's to help us! You can only prove that he's a thief—I don't suppose Dudley cares greatly about that."

Pat smiled like one who sympathizes with a childish intelligence.

"'Tis a nice young green blade of grass ye are, and beautiful in the spring-time, Romer," he bantered pleasantly. "What I can prove against this same Courvoisier ye shall know in good time —perhaps at Charles Street this very night. Keep your soul in patience, and be afther finding Dudley. Yonder's the steamer, me bhoy; we'll see the white cliffs of the Sassenach's country in half an hour by the clock."

He rose abruptly and began to gather his traps together. The cold grey light of a chilling dawn,

breaking across the sea, showed old Pat's face, white and cadaverous, in its feeble rays. A sleepless night had not impaired his vigour. The quest of danger stimulated every faculty, braced an intellect long dormant. He strode down the platform with a young man's step; he sniffed the sea air exultingly. His last words on the shores of France were the defiance of a man who has played a great game and is upon the threshold of his victory.

"In three hours, the best or the worst, me lad—the best or the worst! Yonder's old England—God be thanked!"

* * * * *

Romer had not expected to find, at his uncle's house in Park Lane, a person of greater importance than the old housekeeper who had permanent charge of it; but greatly to his astonishment, Spiler, the butler, answered his knock upon that memorable day, and he was scarcely in the hall before he heard the plaintive voice of Aunt Mary. His surprise was even greater when he learned why the household had come so abruptly to London.

"What's up, Spiler—what the deuce brings you here?"

Spiler answered with something less than his usual gravity. He had not the nerve for domestic tragedies.

"There's been dreadful goings on, sir. Mr. Hatton's nowhere to be heard of, and the young lady, Miss Beryl, she's hooked it without as much as a 'By your leave!'"

It was astonishing news, indeed, and Romer could make nothing of it.

"Miss Beryl gone off? No!" he exclaimed. "You are walking in your sleep, Spiler! Where the deuce should she go to?"

"That's just what I said to Robert this very morning, sir! It never does no good in this world to take brass for eighteen carat! The bringing up of young females, sir——"

"Be hanged to that, Spiler! Where's she gone to, I ask you?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, I mean to say that Miss Beryl borrowed a sovereign of me at nine o'clock yesterday morning and has not since been heard of—leastways, except for the telegram which Miss Mary received last night."

"Oh! there was a telegram, then?"

"Yes, sir; from Cambridge."

Romer roared with laughter.

"Why, you blockhead!" said he, "she's gone to stay with old Norton Bell, of course. The telegram says so if it's from Cambridge. Don't let that sovereign worry you, Spiler; I'll give you nineteen and elevenpence for it!"

He went upstairs with giant strides, and found his Aunt Mary weeping and wailing in the pleasant morning-room which looks upon Hyde Park. The old lady had many new grievances since we saw her last, not the least of them being that the moth had eaten the chair-covers in the back drawing-room. She received Romer on this occasion with a very rhapsody of complaint.

"Not a line for ten days, as I'm a living woman! And this child, who hasn't a bit of linen on her that I haven't marked with my own hand, gone away, Romer! What do you think of that, my dear? I tell you she went off like a thief in the night, at nine o'clock yesterday morning! That's what comes of bringing no children into the world! I said she would pay him out finely—and she's done it! If her clothes were worth a penny, they're worth five pounds; and she's the watch and chain he gave her! He'd better have listened to an old woman; he'd better have listened to me. But I don't count, my child; I'm only a poor old thing whom nobody minds. If I worked the flesh off my bones in this house, they wouldn't thank me. Let him come and look at those chair-covers and then see what his precious housekeeper is worth! He'll die in a garret, I tell you; but I shan't be there to see it—no, I shall be dead and gone!"

Romer consoled her with what assurance he

could. He thought that the covers in the back drawing-room were, possibly, not quite such a tragedy as she imagined. As for Beryl, he read her telegram with infinite amusement. Beryl knew nothing about telegrams ; she had thought it a fine thing to imitate Dudley and to wire as he had wired so often when he delayed to come to Park Lane.

"Don't expect me home to-night, and don't worrit.—BERYL."

The last words were her own. Romer read them with a pleasure he could not quite define. Was it possible that this child would do what they had failed to do—that she would untie that master knot, bring with her the one living being who could save Dudley ? His hope rose with the thought. For Daphne could save Dudley Hatton ; he was sure of it, she could save him if she came in time.

* * * * *

Little Beryl's journey to Cambridge had been a great event in a life which threatened to become eventless. The outcome of splendid ignorance, it bore witness, none the less, to a shrewd instinct for essentials which even an older mind might have lacked in these fateful days. For Beryl had discovered, upon her aunt's hurried return to Park

Lane (a flight which attended the grave news of Dudley's peril), the very letter which Daphne had written to her lover many weeks ago and salaried carelessness had neglected to post. Beryl knew Daphne's handwriting well. She was such a poor mistress of the pen herself that the neat characters and attractive caligraphy of clever Daphne always won upon her unstinted admiration. And here, on Dudley's study table in Park Lane (a room which Beryl considered herself privileged to rummage, as she rummaged every room in that house of forgotten splendours), lay the accusing envelope. Beryl espied it at once and fell to wondering why it lay there. Discreet inquiries of her confidantes among the servants brought to light something of the story. Nobody knew, they said, where Mr. Hatton's letters should be sent; he had given instructions that they were to wait for him in his own library. Beryl did not understand why Daphne's letter should wait upon any table; and she said as much. She thought that if she could see Daphne, this great cloud of trouble, which loomed upon their lives so heavily, might be lifted. It was but a childish idea; she had no sure conclusions; the desire to see Daphne was as vague as it was irresistible. Cambridge, she remembered, from her narrow study of geography, lay somewhere in the middle of the "red piece."

Old maps on Dudley's shelves showed you how near London it was—no more than an inch, and no black scratches for mountains. Beryl was not quite convinced that she could not walk there; but anon, having traditions of Spiler's wealth in her head, she conceived a great idea. Mrs. Wiggins, the housekeeper, had a daughter who was a bed-maker at Cambridge. Artful questions, sly suggestions, elicited the comforting fact that you could go from London by train to that goal of desire and return the same day. Beryl borrowed a sovereign of Spiler and set out without delay.

Her first attack was upon a cabman whom she instructed to drive her to the train for Cambridge; and he, being sensible of his kind, and having children of his own, went to King's Cross as the cab-horse flies, and did not charge her more than twice the fare for all his trouble. From that point a homely guard took her under the shadow of a capacious wing, and having bought her a ticket and a paper, and peeped in at every station to see how she was doing, and told her of other young ladies whom he had escorted under other circumstances, set her down at last upon the platform at Cambridge, and left her there with many words of wisdom and the heroic refusal of the sixpence she offered him. From this point the pilgrimage was not worthy of the fables and the saints. Beryl

just went up to a cabman and told him to drive to the house of Miss Daphne Bell. She remembered enough of Daphne's story to know that this house had something to do with the King or the Queen. When the polite driver corrected her and suggested that she probably meant "Queens'," she agreed that it did not matter. A quarter of an hour later she stood in the gateway of the old red-brick college and asked timidly for Daphne. And oh! the joy of it—as she confessed to Romer afterwards—the joy of it when Daphne herself came running out of a great bleak house, and these two were heart to heart in the purpose of their love!

"Beryl!—Beryl!—is it really little Beryl? You came—you came, dear, to see me? Oh! why—why? Why did you come, Beryl?"

Daphne's questions all came tumbling together like October leaves; surprise, delight, wonder were spoken in every new exclamation. She had been dreaming over a book when they told her that Beryl was in the house, and the very name seemed a link between the living and the dead. Here, then, was the sure confirmation of all that she had read about Dudley in the bygone weeks. Every word of that strange story was known to Daphne. She could tell you exactly where he had been, and what he had done, and why the world quarrelled with him. She had mastered the nature of his trouble,

despite its amazing technicality; her daily prayer had been that he might summon her, and that she might go to him in this evil hour of his life. When the newspapers related the peril from which he had escaped, Daphne trembled as for her own safety. She feared sometimes to read the news, lest it should speak of the ultimate calamity. Always present was that sense of humiliation and insignificance which his silence had put upon her. Their love had been the dream of a day, then! She had won from him that fleeting homage which a memory can inspire. She lived amongst her heroes no more. Perhaps her courage rebelled against the treatment to which she had been subjected, and she would ask no man for forgiveness twice. Let her cost be what it might, it should not cost her self-abjection.

"Is it—is it little Beryl? I can't believe it, dear—I cannot believe that you are my Beryl of the long ago! And you have come to see me! Oh! why—why, why did you come, little Beryl?"

She was in her own room now, that pretty room where, in the childish years, she had wooed the heroes of her own romances. The very pictures on the walls were from the masterpieces of the romantic art. The books were the love-stories of the immortals. An open window disclosed a vista of the river and the gardens, the splendid bridges, and the avenues defying time. Beryl enjoyed one

delighted peep at this fairyland of court and college before she answered Daphne.

"It's better than Park Lane!" she cried, with a child's admiration, "lots better! And oh!—the flowers, they really are flowers, Daphne!"

Daphne took both her hands in her own and compelled her to answer.

"Why did you come, little Beryl—why?"

"I came to bring you the letter, dear."

She did not know what these words meant to the trembling girl who hugged her so closely, nor could she understand Daphne's almost angry impatience.

"The letter!—what letter? Oh, be quick, Beryl! you torture me!"

Beryl went on with exasperating deliberation.

"The dusty one. I know it was Spiler; but you mustn't say so, because he'd get the—the—something he says. He lent me a sovereign, you know; and I came in the train; and the old clergyman drank out of a bottle every time it got dark; and when I looked at him, he asked me if I played hockey; and the guard made him pay some money, and he said he'd sew the company; and I said all the time—oh, Daphne! where have you been, what have you been doing?"

She broke off impulsively, alarmed, perhaps, at that look which had passed suddenly into Daphne's

eyes. Beryl was frightened now; frightened at this shadow of a woman's trouble, cast suddenly upon her childhood. She had never heard Daphne speak like this; never seen her eyes so bright or her gesture so imperative. And how calm she was, how far away in thought from Cambridge and that pretty room! When next she spoke, it was the old Daphne, the Daphne of Sonning and the summer-time.

"It was brave of you, Beryl, so brave," she said, compelling herself to be patient. "And now you will give me the letter while I ring for some lunch."

Beryl protested that she did not want any lunch, but she searched for the letter all the same—a crumpled, grimy, forgotten letter, in the depths of some capacious pocket; and handing it to Daphne, she said—

"I knew you wrote it, because I try to cross my t's like you do. But I can't get them right, dear, and it makes a blot as big as——"

She did not finish her simile, for she was afraid of the sound of her own voice. Both Daphne's hands were tight about the letter now; her lip was quivering; she could not see the sunshine in the room. A great hope, foolishly conceived, had been abandoned as suddenly as it was born. For a moment she had believed that Dudley had called her to his side in the pathetic hour; but this, this

secret of the weeks of silence broke her courage and robbed her of the last shred of her purpose.

"It's my letter—mine, Beryl!" she cried again and again. "I left it for Dudley. How cruel of them!"

Little Beryl had no solace for such a cry as that.

"I said it was yours, and no one would listen to me. We did not know where to send it, and that's why I'm here. He never comes near us, Daphne; he hasn't been for weeks. I know he's in trouble; I know he wants us."

Daphne crushed the letter defiantly; and turning away, she stood at the window, while a servant began to lay the cloth for lunch; and old Norton Bell's voice was heard upon the staircase. When the maid had left the room, Beryl crept close to Daphne's side; and kissing her, she asked to be forgiven.

"You're not angry with me, Daphne? you won't be cross? Oh! if you would go to him, how different it would be, dear! You will go, Daphne?"

Long minutes passed before her question was answered. She seemed to know that she must wait with resignation for that supreme resolution. When it came at last, her reward was abundant. Daphne dreamed no more. A child led her as she willed to be led.

"Oh! you little Beryl—that it should be you —you!" she said, as in an ecstasy of a purpose suddenly conceived. "That you should show me the way I should follow!"

"You will go, Daphne, dear?"

"This day, this hour, little guide."

"You will find him, Daphne?"

"Wherever he is, little Beryl, in sunshine or the darkness, I will find him to-day!"

She had never thought that a determination could mean so much to her. For a full month her days had been droned away in the solitude of that house of sleep and silence. The dying summer, the falling leaf, the empty courts, the nadir of Cambridge's desolation played upon a temperament susceptible to such influences. Daphne wondered in those long weeks why she had been a dreamer in the years of long ago. How different life was! how relentless! how cruel! Her own love for Dudley, swift in its youth, matured in the first ardour of a passionate nature, seemed at its birth the supreme satisfaction the world could give her. All voids were filled then, all questions answered, all of womanhood made clear. She loved as she had wished to love in the imagination of the past. All that she could give, the gift of herself, her soul and body, her heart and homage, had she given freely; but the swift destiny which enveloped her, how

unforeseen it had been, how bitter to realize! In her reckoning, there was no place for the thought that she must abase herself to a lover whose lips were dumb. The unanswered letter brought her from cloudland to the earth of a simple truth. She had said at the first: "His answer will come to-day"; and when the day did not bring it, she said it would be to-morrow. The postman's step in the court of Queens' could set her heart throbbing and bring the blood to her cheek. She had a hundred explanations for Dudley's silence; but none of them satisfied her. At least he should have said: "I do not wish it; let the dead past bury the dead." Her self-reproach for that which remained unspoken was more poignant every day. Why had she been silent when he had so greatly trusted her? What foolish scruple made her dumb? Daphne believed sometimes that it was the punishment of her own romantic vanity. The image it had set up asked homage, but not compassion. As the days went by, she learnt to know that compassion is sometimes the better thing. Life had humbled her; but her love was enduring.

* * * * *

"We'll find him, little Beryl, wherever he is; we'll find him."

"In London, dear Daphne, to-day. Oh! let it be to-day!"

"We'll go to him and say: 'Dudley, do you wish it?'"

"He'll answer 'Yes'; I know he'll answer 'Yes.'"

* * * * *

They quitted Cambridge by the five o'clock train. As their cab went westward from King's Cross, a man walking down the Strand observed its occupants; and standing for a little while amazed, he turned at length with slow steps towards the Metropole Hotel.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PURSUIT OF COURVOISIER

THE rendezvous was the Junior Turf Club in Piccadilly; the hour six o'clock. Scarcely had the great gong in the entrance-hall ceased to strike the hour, when old Pat Foxall espied Romer in his cab and hastened out to remind him that punctuality was the politeness of kings.

"To the tick, young sir. You have news, Romer?"

"Not a word, Pat."

"There's no letter from Dudley, at Park Lane?"

"Devil a sign of one."

"They haven't seen him?"

"Not one of them."

"You've been to the Great Southern?"

"Like an arrow to a miss. He's not been there since last Saturday."

"And Macalister?"

"He's just raving."

"Then they can't get at him from the office now?"

"As true as the prophets. He's on the railway somewhere. That's all they do know."

"Faith! I was right entirely."

"It's a riddle, old Pat, a beastly riddle!"

"Aye, to be solved this night. Do you see that man yonder?"

"What! the man with the big boots?"

"No other! 'Tis Inspector Morris. There are three more to be with us in Charles Street. We'll take the bird Courvoisier in the nest, faith!—and not be particular about the eggs. Come on, lad; there's time for a wee nip. Your felt shoes are in the bag there. I'm supposing you have a barker?"

Romer touched his hip-pocket significantly, and, being introduced to the stranger, the three drank a glass of cognac apiece and talked about the weather. It was a quarter past six precisely when a private brougham drove up to the Club for them and they entered it nonchalantly.

In the carriage the detective consented to remember why he was there.

"It will be a big thing to-night, gentlemen," he said, and qualified the remark with the stipulation, "if we're fortunate."

Patrick would not hear of failure.

"We *must* be fortunate," he said masterfully. "What's to stop us, Mr. Morris?"

"A clever rogue, by name Courvoisier, sir; one of the cleverest in London."

"You've come to that conclusion, then?"

"It's the only possible conclusion. I'll not deny you've helped us, Mr. Foxall."

"Aye, say that you've been watching the man for months, and were about to arrest him!"

"In a way it's true; but not on Mr. Hatton's account."

"Then on Jan Beckstein's, I suppose?"

"Exactly. We've been watching this Dutch gang for twelve months. It was just two months ago that Mr. Hatton's valet joined them. There are big charges, Mr. Foxall; conspiracy is one of them, and half a dozen jobs in the States as well. We'll see our own through first."

"You mean the Great Southern?"

"Undoubtedly I do. It shouldn't be very difficult to prove that the man who shot at Mr. Hatton at Kennington was paid by Beckstein or his agents for that dirty work."

"And nearly earned his money. Faith! 'tis just that I'm fearing. The valet was in Beckstein's pay, no doubt of it! They took advantage of the trouble on the railway to be clear of a man that's cost them enough to float a bank. Next time

there'll be no mistakes. If we do not trap these rogues to-night, Heaven help my friend! 'Tis good men I hope you're bringing, Mr. Morris, and plenty of them."

"I've put four in the street; we shall take two to go in with us over the roofs. The police on the beat hold the stables. If your Frenchman passes that lot, he's a clever man. But he won't, Mr. Foxall; he'll be at Bow Street before ten o'clock!"

Patrick said "So be it!" and threw his cigar away. At the far corner of Berkeley Square the little force was marshalled, and the Irishman uttered a timely warning.

"One by one," he said, "and thirty yards between us. Do you cross the road, Romer, and keep as close as you can. 'Tis No. 3 we're making for, and sharp eyes to show us in. Faith, if this Courvoisier spots but the back of your head, he'll have a run for his money, after all!"

Reuben Morris was less apprehensive.

"Don't trouble about that, Mr. Foxall," said he, with some assurance. "We don't mind the run if the money's to be got. I shouldn't be surprised if he gave us trouble inside, though. He's the kind to show fight, and plenty of it. If he does, I shall look to Mr. Romer here to be a little handy with his stick."

Romer should have been flattered by this tribute to his physique, but the object of his immediate interest was a shuttered, solitary house—almost the first they came to in Charles Street—upon the doorstep of which Reuben Morris lingered, as one who has some right of familiarity and was there expected. His confident ring conjured up from the inhabited shades a pious and venerable butler, who, as the detective whispered to his friends, was a very pattern of virtue in plush breeches. For a simple consideration of five pounds this hoary seneschal would permit them to ascend to the roof of the house and there admire the view. His master was in the Engadine—he was quite sure that he would approve.

"I've 'ad my eye on that shop ever since last Christmas," he informed them, while he led them into the hall and showed them the way upstairs. "There's been rum goings on in No. 14B, gentlemen, I must say! The females in particular is extraordinary! I do 'ope you'll teach 'em their place, Mr. Morris—which is not Charles Street, Berkeley Square, by a long way! This way, if you please. The cook says she's had no time to tidy up her bedroom, not knowing you were coming, so she 'opes Justice will be blind."

The platitudes carried him to the attic storey. A great lover of propriety, he knocked at the cook's

bedroom door, although he knew that that worthy was below. His loquacity went unanswered. The others, perhaps, would not deny their anxiety. It meant so much, this night's work; to one man it might mean life or death.

The butler opened the lattice which gave upon the roof of the house, and the three men stepped out upon the leads. The detective's last word was the instruction that they would not come back.

"You can close the window and bar it, Mr. James," he said authoritatively. "We're much obliged to you, I'm sure. I'll see that this is remembered."

Mr. James shook his head.

"I didn't think of that, gentlemen—I 'ope I do my duty. When I saw them female persons ——"

They did not pause even for a history of the "female persons," and the venerable old man stood at the window while they crept on over the leads, treading like cats and very watchful. One by one Reuben Morris counted the houses they passed. Upon the roof of 14B he stopped and raised his finger.

"Your felt slippers, if you please, gentlemen," he said in a whisper.

He took his own from a capacious pocket, and when he had slipped them on, he advanced a step

and peered round the corner of the dormer window. The result reassured him, for he took a jemmy from his coat and began to force the bolt with a skill of an expert. The plan of attack was as clear now as daylight. Romer saw that the doors of the house below were watched by Morris's colleagues; while, from above, the dogs would bark to drive the fox from covert. No foresight of those within the house troubled a plan so simple. Whatever secret of their meeting-place they had been careful to safeguard, the idea of danger from above clearly escaped their reckoning. For the window yielded at the first attack; it opened without any noise of splintered wood or crashing glass; it said, as plainly as possible: "No sentinel here." Reuben Morris was through in two minutes, and old Patrick, laborious and groaning, after him. Romer, following lithely but with a zeal no less, found himself anon in a dismal attic littered with shabby ornament of damp-stained rolls of paper and forgotten trunks. He knew that they were in the house at last; he knew that in five minutes the best or the worst would be told.

Now Reuben Morris, dropping lightly to the attic's floor, stood there for a space and lent a hunter's ear to any sound that might come up from below. Once he thought he could distinguish a shuffling step; but the noise passed and profound

silence followed upon it. Thereafter he could not so much as hear a clock ticking in the house; and playing boldly for the stake, he beckoned the others to follow, and stair by stair began to go down to the rooms below. Every step now was to the goal where gain or loss would mean so much. A blunder would have undone all. But the three went with sure foothold; and as they went, one at least asked himself many questions. Romer's imagination dealt doubtingly with such a situation as this. Was Courvoisier indeed below? Would this night really bring him to justice? He did not dare to think of it. The silence of the house mocked him; he was ready to tell himself that it was a fool's errand, when a sound from below made his heart leap and seemed to chain him to the boards.

Clearly, ominously, unmistakably, a door swung upon its hinges and the lock clicked.

For a full minute the three did not stir a step from their place upon the stairs. They seemed as those who waited for a second signal—even, it might be, for the danger of which they were conscious. When silence fell again, when the spell of it passed, Reuben Morris continued his descent without a word. He alone knew what the signal meant to him—the justification of his plan, the sure knowledge that the bird was in the trap and the lid was down.

Step by step, inch by inch, he closed in upon that prince of criminals. Now kneeling, now crouching at the drawing-room door, he threw it open at last with a gesture which could not but be dramatic; and, pistol in hand, he boldly entered in. His savage cry proclaimed failure.

"Sold, by thunder!" is all he says.

The two pressed in after him and stared about that trap which had failed them so mysteriously. Just as Dudley had seen the room many weeks ago, so it was to-night. A single lamp betrayed its shuttered windows, its close-drawn curtains, its flimsy basket chairs and bizarre ornament. Now, as then, the back room was unfurnished but for the iron safe beneath its curtained window. If change there were, it was a subtle change declaring the absence of a woman's hand. Torn papers littered the wicker tables; the curtains lacked their ties. There was an ash-tray with ashes cheek by jowl with a vase of withered flowers. A man's cane stood in the corner; the paper of that very afternoon lay folded upon a chair. These things the trained eye took in at one swift glance; but the mystery beyond them earned the baffled cry, the bewildered faces.

Courvoisier had fled!

"He's in the house. I'll lay a thousand pounds he's in the house!" cries Morris in a deep, hoarse

whisper. "Up with you, gentlemen! he can't cheat us! There's not a hole unwatched that a rat could crawl through!"

He was up the stairs to the storey above almost before they had grasped the truth. Hither, thither, as a terrier in the gorse, this agile, cat-like figure turned. The emptiness of the rooms expedited the hounds' track to which he gave himself so willingly. On the floor above, a mean bedroom lacked covering for its bed; a dressing-room had no other furniture than an empty trunk. Or down below again to the kitchens, there were cooking utensils on the hob, and they had been recently used; but the dishes were unwashed and the fire had burned low. In the cellars, they netted a great catch of empty bottles. Every door they opened seemed to say: "There is nothing here." In the drawing-room once more, Reuben Morris had a finger for every panel, a foot for every board. By what amazing trick had he been cheated, then? he asked himself a hundred times. Who had been before him? Who had warned this master rogue? For warned Courvoisier certainly had been. The great safe was evidence enough for that—its door stood open; its contents were gone.

They searched the room, gathered together the petty witnesses of occupation, had a hundred ideas, and would carry out none of them; were, in truth,

about to declare that all was in vain, when a second surprise of that long-remembered night denied the assertion and sent them leaping to their feet again. It was a turn of fortune so utterly unlooked for, such a key to all that had befallen, that for a spell they could take no advantage of it nor lift a hand to further it. For what should it be but that, while they were in the very act of abandoning the pursuit, and granting that their rogue was gone, they heard the sound of a key turning in the lock? And listening and looking to the back room whence the sounds came, they observed to their amazement that the chimney-piece appeared to swing suddenly upon its hinges; and opening like a door, it allowed three men to pass into the room and to stand there in earnest converse. So occupied were the three, so intent upon their own employment, that a full minute passed before they understood the situation or could make anything of it; and when they did so, but one of the three could ask his wits to help him. This man was red-bearded and brown, frock-coated and faultlessly dressed. He had a diamond ring upon his finger, a cigar newly lit in his mouth. The first to espy strangers in the outer room, he surrendered to the danger at a glance and with a loud oath disappeared as he had come. The chimney-piece, swinging on its hinges, barred the road to his accomplices, who would have followed him.

They hurled themselves upon the barrier impotently; strong hands had pinned them by the throat before they could take a second step.

"Jan Beckstein, by all that's holy!" cries Reuben Morris. "Break the door, Mr. Foxall! beat it in! These are only the chickens; the dog fox is yonder—behind that wall!

Reuben Morris, after all, was just as human as other men. That fine air of reserve and stealth, almost habitual to the common affairs of life, went by the board in the thrill of this magnificent pursuit. While he stood at the outer door, with his revolver covering the two men trapped so providentially, he was no longer detective, but huntsman crying the view halloa. Subtle ways and means for the moment were unknown. Old Patrick Foxall hammering obstinately at the forbidding chimney, Romer forcing open the shutters with a giant hand, were not quick enough for his impatience. The scent was keen, but the quarry had escaped him. At a later day, recounting it, Romer declared that Reuben Morris danced a jig. Unhappily, such an exercise availed nothing. The wall of brick and iron defied old Pat's persistent bludgeon. The open shutter declared that the fox had broken cover and that the hounds were baffled. Jan Beckstein was half way to Piccadilly by this

time. Romer told them so from his place by the window.

"He's fooled you all along, Mr. Morris; his cab's clear away by this time, and going like mad!"

They stared at one another blankly, and for a space no man spoke. The strangers, huddled together, as for mutual protection, knew that they were in a trap and feared the consequences. Sweat ran off Reuben Morris's face like rain. He understood what need there was of haste, but yet could question his prisoners with patience.

"Now, my men, we'll have a little talk!"

They were rough fellows, plainly dressed in blue serge, and obviously engineers from the Great Southern Railway. Their peaked caps and grime-stained hands bore witness to a spell of unwelcome holiday. They had come to Charles Street at the invitation of a rogue, who, by the aid of such as these and their differences, would serve his own fortunes. Honest men until starvation overtook them, to-night they realized the fruits of their dishonesty. When they spoke, it was with humbleness and almost a pathetic appeal for mercy. Reuben Morris questioned them with the skill of a judge.

"You came here to meet Mr. Beckstein—eh?"

"We did, sir, and Mr. Mallard, his manager."

"Oh! does Mr. Mallard live next door, then?"

"We have been given to understand so, sir."

"Ah! that accounts for the road between the houses. Didn't suit him to use his own parlour sometimes, I suppose. Had his watch-dog near him, eh? And what did he say to you—something nice?"

They fingered their caps, looking down abashed to avoid that keen glance.

"He wished to speak about Mr. Hatton, sir. There's to be a meeting to-night at the sheds in Kennington Lane."

"Oh! there's to be a meeting, is there? And you were to be there, I take it?"

"Yes, sir; he wanted us to go; but we refused."

"Refused?"

"Indeed, sir, yes. We do not approve of what's to be done there."

"How do you mean? Why don't you approve? Come, be plain; it will help you in the long run."

The elder man looked up and answered frankly—

"If there's any friend of Mr. Dudley Hatton's in this room, he'd better go to him at once and say: 'Keep away from Kennington Lane to-night if you value your life!'"

"What! Do they mean to murder him, then?"

The man answered bluntly—

"I won't say that, sir; but there might be an accident."

Reuben Morris waited for no more.

"To Kennington Lane!" he cried, turning away and snatching up his hat. "There's not a moment to lose."

CHAPTER XXVI

JUSTICE

THE night fell dark and starless, with promise of a harvest moon and the gentle summer breezes. Upon the Great Southern Railway the beacon fires had flared up almost as soon as twilight set in, and thereafter the armies of the workers came out and ranged themselves in angry ranks, threatening and mutinous. From the terminus itself, away to Kennington and the distant suburbs, the patrols of discontent kept their anxious vigil. Gaunt faces bent over the reddening fires and swore that to-morrow should give them bread. The prudent counsels of the terrified few earned coarse oaths and the bravo's threat. All seemed to know that the end was near. All waited for the tidings of that hour momentous.

In and out of these grim companies, greatly fearing, greatly daring, went Daphne with little Beryl, hand in hand, upon their quixotic mission.

They had set out to seek the man they loved, and they would not turn back until they had found him. All the terror of the scene did not affright them. The Dantesque vignettes of the darkness, the flares, the flashing lights, the confusion, the clamour could not turn them from their purpose or change it. Very close together, very silent and afraid, driven by brutal tongues, believing that Dudley's very life was at stake, they nevertheless went on heedlessly over the tangled rails and the flinty track, by deserted stations, now in a blaze of light, now in the fuller darkness, to the goal of their safety. For men had said that Dudley would be at Kennington ; others, with an oath, wished that he might be there. The crisis had come, they declared; the night would decide it.

* * * * *

There were others going to Kennington, and not the least worthy among them old Patrick Foxall and Romer the giant. These, too, were appalled by that scene of mutiny and riot everywhere confronting them upon that once great railway. They had not believed it would be like this. The truth surpassed the stories even of imaginative reporters ; desolation, utter and supreme, proved the fruit of those terrible weeks. At any other time, the fascination of many a grim picture would have delayed their step or

won upon their interest. But Dudley's need drove them headlong. They believed that in his folly he would risk all upon one last rash throw, and facing the men in anger would pay folly with his life. They knew him so well—his pride, his courage, his indomitable will. And to save him from himself they hurried on with bent heads and raking strides, asking each other : " Is it too late ? "

* * * * *

And Dudley himself ? Where shall we look for him whom so many seek ? Patrick Foxall once had said that it would be in such a place as a fool would think of and a wise man overlook. The event justified the prophet. For ten days exactly Dudley had been staying at the Metropole Hotel. For nine of those days he would admit that he scarcely knew how he lived or what he did. Crises, which once stimulated, now maddened him. He believed that he had lost the power to reason calmly or to act upon those stable principles by which prosperity had come to him. Defiance usurped the place of a saner judgment which alone could cope with this surpassing ill. At war with all the world, he regarded himself as the sport of a malicious Destiny whose challenge awakened in him the combative faculty and fostered it with all the false logic of the supposititiously inevitable. What were these men to him, that he should

mete out to them a human measure and not that of the sterner creed which Commerce preached? What was it to him if women wept and children cried for bread? Did these suffer as he suffered? Was their burden lighter than his? Pride, a factor of the case, would urge that the Destiny which showed no mercy asked none. This great railway had been his own creation, his very child, the pride of his eye and the glory of his hand. Should weakness destroy it, he asked, when by strength it would live? Day by day he fortified himself in his sterner resolution, and surrendered to that argument fanatical. The men must submit, they must perish—what mattered it? Charity was a thing apart; philanthropy had no place in the director's rule of life! Let the parson see to it, he cried—the parsons, who believed in God! His own task was clear—he must save the Great Southern.

Many saner judgments pleaded with him in that week of trail; but none with a finer instinct for the truth than his partner, James Macalister.

"For the sake of all those ye hold dear in this world, do justice to your men," this was Macalister's daily prayer. He was convinced that justice would be done. When he went on to speak of plot and counterplot, Dudley closed his ears.

"They threaten me, James? Very well! I will remember that! Go back to the office; my

mind is made up. It will be a fight to the finish—we dare not give in ! "

Macalister wrung his hands and left him in despair. Dudley had read somewhere in an evening paper that the men were to meet at Kennington Lane that night and there to reaffirm their unflinching resolution. A patronizing gossiper spoke of a personal danger—a tattling paragraph—and declared that Dudley was afraid. When Dudley read it, he resolved to go to Kennington without delay. Fear of man he had never known in his life. He would show them if he were afraid.

He spent the day alone in London as any wayfarer of the pavement. The morning carried him for a spell to ride in the parks and to forget the city round about him. He was at the office for one short hour and away again at noon. Clubs which he had long forgotten opened their doors to him, but gave him no welcome. He sat out one act of a pretty love play and laughed at its simplicity. Returning to his hotel, the great event befell. In a crowd of faces he beheld one face whose image he had re-created so often, to worship it in silent homage. It was the face of Daphne, passing swiftly as a vision in that hurrying throng. Dudley stopped as though a hand from the grave had touched him.

This was the hour for kindlier reason ; and thinking it out very methodically, he walked on a little way

and asked himself if it were really Daphne or another. Some good instinct assured him that he had not been mistaken. She had come to him upon this fateful day, that she might—but he dared not pursue the question further. Like a man in a profound reverie he returned to his hotel and his room. The woman he loved was in London at last! He flung himself upon a sofa and pressed cold hands to his aching head. She had come to seek him out—Daphne, at whose word he had suffered so much. A great longing for love and the friendship of love was the first-fruit of her sacrifice. Already the delirium of those days abated and began to be forgotten. He said that he was very tired. The fatigue of reaction fell heavily upon him, and turning his face to the wall, he slept. In his sleep he uttered her name aloud.

A knock at the door awoke him from this heavy slumber at eight o'clock; and he knew that for the first time for many weeks he had rested in his sleep. The crisis of these harassing days passed as miraculously as it arose. He awoke like a man freed from chronic pain, with a clearer brain, a mind more active, a surer instinct for essentials. The mad strife in which he had been engaged seemed like some evil dream of yesterday. He knew that it was at an end; that never would it trouble him again. Even at the moment of waking he could remember that

Daphne was in London ! What else mattered now ? She had come to say : " I understand " ; to lead him from the past to that future of her love. And never did a man so sorely need the help, the affection of those dear to him. At any cost he would find Daphne that night. He did not doubt that she was already at the Great Southern Hotel asking for news of him ; he wondered that he had delayed an instant when he saw her in the Strand. She had come to him ; all was forgotten in that. When they waked him from sleep, he was willing to believe that her messenger waited, and he opened the door with a trembling hand. But the summons came from other sources—he had little patience to hear it.

" What do you want—why do you trouble me at this time ? "

The man, a servant of the hotel, offered a sheepish apology, and did not confess that a guinea had brought him upon the errand. In the hall below, he said, were two of the engineers from the Kennington sheds. No other explanation was asked or given. Dudley knew that these men had come to tell him of the mass meeting to be held that night at Kennington ; perhaps to re-state their ultimatum and demand an issue. That which yesterday had seemed of such transcendent importance now presented itself as something commonplace and trivial. He wondered why he had ever

quarrelled with the poor devils on the railway. Was it for money? No, assuredly, for he had money enough to buy a kingdom. Was it at the bidding of ambition? Then truly the affection of his men and not their hostility must be his interest. The scales had fallen from his eyes, indeed, and a woman's hand had given him sight. He told himself that he was going to Daphne, and that her justice should prevail that night. She would applaud his resolution. It would be reward enough if he might say: "I love you!—beyond anything in my life, I love you!"

He called the engineers to his room and heard them out impatiently. Faithfully and with justification they pointed out that the men's terms were moderate. He admitted it with a brief word. The railway was being ruined, they put it. He granted that. There were many starving, they said. His face blanched, but he would not controvert them. To-night at Kennington those terms would be confirmed in a new resolution, they declared. Dudley said he supposed so. They asked him if he had no message for the men; they implored him, for pity's sake, to bring peace. His answer was a single line written upon a piece of note-paper. The men went sobbing from the room.

It was half-past eight then, but he would not wait for dinner; and having drunk a glass of sherry

and eaten a sandwich, he put on a long, dark overcoat, and wearing a golfer's cap, and carrying a stout oak stick in his hand, he set out for the railway, because he believed that he would find Daphne there. A messenger sent to the Great Southern Hotel had already returned with tidings of the best. They had been there, those little friends of his, and finding him not, had gone to seek him where he should be found. He said that the hunted must now become the hunter. It was an ecstasy to imagine the moment of their meeting, to rehearse the words of his affection, and to believe that this night he might win all. Of his own case he did not think at all ; he feared nothing from the men now. He did not know at what a price he would find the woman he loved.

There was a great crowd about the terminus when he entered it, and many evidences of that which the terrible weeks had cost the company. A very army of idle *employés* swarmed about the converging streets and passed the news boisterously. The night express to Havre, which should have left at eight o'clock, was still belated at the platform, where frenzied passengers besieged the staunch officials and asked ironically if they must walk. Confusion was everywhere, and with confusion the disorder and the doubt of riot. Steaming engines dragged odd carriages here and there, as though uncertain where to shunt them. Interminable rows

of empty vehicles confessed the inactivity and the strikers' victory. Angry faces and wild eyes were the tribute of the few who remained faithful. A single express from the Continent, threading the labyrinth to its peril, was met by a storm of hisses and an answering shout of triumph. There were no porters to help the over-bold who had ventured in. You beheld the spectacle, here amusing, there grievous, of fat men who had never done a day's work in their lives, struggling with giant portmanteaus or swearing by unknown gods that they would write to the *Times ;* women, strangers to the city, frankly abandoned hope and surrendered themselves to tears. A magnificent inspector, hither, thither, like the genius of the night, could conjure up no order of this dire *mêlée.* Local traffic had entirely ceased. There were but half the lamps lighted on the iron bridge which spans the Thames. The man in the signal-box had worked for twenty hours, and dragged his feet as he walked. Beyond the station, into the darkness of the night, there went little companies of strikers ready for any devil's work and abandoned to the pursuit of it. One name you heard above all others—the name of Dudley Hatton. Men took an oath that they would kill him, could they but lay hands upon him. He walked amongst these men unseen, unrecognized, save by one or two who kept his secret. It was

no new thing to him to hear men blaspheme his name, or to see them cringe at his command. Such tributes of hostility did but confirm his resolution yesterday; but to-night he was deaf to them. To the beggars he cast money freely; for the men themselves he would not refuse a certain pity. The beacon fires revealed to him a measure of the suffering and a price of that distress he had not yet realized. Wan faces and shrunken figures, savage eyes and nerveless hands met him at every turn. He saw little children at their father's side, paying in tears as children pay, but trusting still. He listened without flinching to a man who told him that his little girl was dead; though he knew the implied charge and could have answered it. He would have given the fellow money, but the man, who recognized him, flung it back with a father's oath. And it was fate, he thought, that this man should betray him to the rabble. Doggedly, persistently, the fellow pursued one whom he believed to be the author of his woes, and as he went he beckoned to others, crying: "Yonder's Dudley Hatton! Do you want to see him, mates?" The news ran on like tidings of battle. Ruffians debouched from secret corners, and quitting the fires and the shelter, they, too, followed Dudley. Their purpose was unmistakable; he did not deceive himself. He knew his danger, and gripping his stick in a good hand,

and trying to make light of all he heard, went on the faster. But every shed, every station, every shop and siding, contributed its quotum to the pursuit. There were a thousand men upon his heels when he sighted Kennington Lane and remembered his destination. They followed him like wolves, with stealthy foot, determinedly. From time to time a low murmur, like that of some human sea upon an unfriendly shore, rolled over this swaying, jostling crowd. It was the murmur of a troop that had found its prey. Dudley did not believe that he had five minutes to live. It was decreed, then, that he should not meet Daphne again, or, meeting her, must say: "It is too late!" So did Destiny play with him: but at least he would die unafraid.

There were many houses about the engine-sheds of the Great Southern Railway at its junction at Kennington; and in one of these, the machine-shop of the works, two thousand of the strikers were gathered when Dudley approached the place. Some idea, perchance, that he would claim the protection of this meeting and escape by the moderation of its leaders, came to the rabble as it pressed about his heels and exclaimed upon its own delay. Rallied by the possibility, when the station's lights burst upon its view, the bolder among them ran on ahead and barred the road he would have followed. No

longer were the hunters silent ; stealth did not serve them now. Some, grown over-bold, pressed about their man and cursed him to his face ; others, from a safer place, threw granite stones until their comrades were struck and turned upon them. Always in the forefront of the throng was the man who had spoken of his child's death and charged it to Dudley's account. What vengeance he planned, that or the moment of it, he himself, probably, did not know ; but, animated by a reluctant malice, he raised his hand from time to time and said : " Not yet, mates —not yet ! " The minutes were to Dudley such minutes as a man may pass at the scaffold's foot ; he knew not from instant to instant what hand would strike him down. The savage cries in his ears, sticks brandished, the flying stones, left him without word or sigh. He did not answer the threats, he did not turn to confront the mob. Quietly, doggedly he pursued his road until that road was barred and hope of it impossible. And here, he thought, the end must come. The immense deserted offices, peopled in common times by the engineers of the line, were black and tenantless upon his left hand now. In the distance, to the right, he could distinguish the mighty arc-lamps giving a mellow glow to the faces of the gathered thousands who had waited for his ultimatum. There would be safety amongst those men, he reflected bitterly ; but five hundred

barred the passage! He read murder in their eyes: he knew not what miracle could help him.

There were the deserted offices upon his left hand, and the door of one of these stood open. The police who guarded the building shrank back into the shadow of the wall when the mob came up; and Dudley could admit that they were prudent men. The temper of the mob behind him brooked no resistance from such as these! Leisurely as he went, and with an assumption of nonchalance which even won upon the admiration of the ruffian horde, his keen glance none the less was hither, thither, in that last frenzied desire of life. Whither should he turn —what hand could snatch him from these wolves around him? He answered the question for himself. With a quick, agile movement, defying in its suddenness the counter-attack, he leaped for the open door and by his very audacity parried the danger. Hoarse shouts of rage answered him. Headlong, men sought to fling themselves in his path; but his stick beat them down, his swiftness daunted them. They cried to one another to brain him; in their rage they threw their weapons after him. But the iron bars rang impotently against the open door; the gate was shut; the prey was caged.

Dudley bolted the door with ironic calmness and turned to the solitary guardian of the deserted

offices. This man could make nothing of the intrusion, nor was he prepared for it. He did not recognise the "chief." He began an angry expostulation —it faltered out in a stammered apology.

"Are you alone here?" Dudley asked him.

"There's three of my mates in the shop," he blurted out, "and the sergeant's with a dozen more at the sheds, sir. We didn't look for anything like this to-night, Mr. Hatton, I really do believe they'll break the door in!"

Dudley laughed softly and began to go upstairs.

"Get word to the station if you can," he said quietly; "the door will hold long enough for that. I am going up to Mr. Patterson's office—perhaps higher, if there are any stones. You'll need at least a hundred men—and they ought to come quickly. I shall give you a hundred pounds if you bring them in ten minutes."

The man turned the shutter of his lantern with a snap and did not wait to hear any more. He, at any rate, was glad enough to be out of that *inferno*. The door would not stand five minutes, he said. Volleys of blows threatened to beat it down at any instant. He could hear the strikers' raucous appeals and he knew what his own life would be worth if these came in. Splendid heels carried him to the police-station; but Dudley had already

reached an office upon the third floor and entered it with confidence.

He did not fear the outbreak now. Yesterday, by his own instructions, the doors of this very building had been clamped with iron and doubly barred against such an emergency as this. Did they give way, he said, the refuge of the shops was still open to him. His familiarity with the building would permit him to thread a passage which would defy the rioters. For the danger itself, now that the crisis was turned, he cared nothing. The men had their excuses. Those who now cursed might in half an hour applaud him. He was content to be the witness of these changing passions ; and his first act upon entering the room had been to switch on the electric light and to go to the window. A thunderous roar of baffled rage greeted this defiance so dramatic. He beheld a writhing carpet of human figures from which arms were thrust out and faces uplifted—here of youth and vigour, there vacant faces, anon the visages of men whom the vortex of existence had caught in its eddies and cast out blind and raging. Far and wide, the trembling arc-lamps shone down upon a scene of hysterical ferocity. The hail of stones was incessant, the clamour deafening, the purpose unmistakable. They would kill the man who had denied them bread—drag him out, strike him down. Dudley marvelled at the in-

difference with which he heard them. The ring of light in which they stood was like a great golden circle described upon a field of intenser darkness. Beyond it, he could distinguish the wan lamps of squalid houses, and the glimmering rails, running like a silver ribbon beneath the clear light of a harvest moon. Church bells chimed the hour; the hum of the distant city was audible in that high place even above the outcry. Impossible to believe that he, who an hour ago had all the world free to him, was now the prisoner of this swaying mob which snarled and thundered its recriminations at the apparition of the window. How they threatened him! with what gestures they defied him! Their voices were like the anger of winds, now droning and gentle, anon moaning; or, upon that, dying away in hoarse whispers of the blast. And it was odd that they should be echoed by other voices, the voices of those in yonder sheds where the saner of the workmen were in council. Dudley could not mistake that rolling volley of cheers which an iron roof gave back to him and the night breeze carried. His concessions to the men must be made known by this time. They were cheering because they learned that peace was the recompense of their labour. He would not begrudge them a triumph so emphatic. By and by these others, also, those who bellowed beneath his windows and demanded

his life, would have the tidings and act upon them. He understood that their praise would find him as indifferent as their blame. The iron nerve which permitted him to stand immobile before that storm of groans and hisses owed little to his native courage, but much to the hope beyond it. Even in the hour of crisis he had remembered Daphne and little Beryl, and wondered if they stood in the midst of scenes so violent. He did not imagine that they were in harm's way; but the uncertainty troubled him, and he reckoned up the minutes before the police could be warned, and fell to speculating if they would come in time. Be that as it might, he resolved that he would not sleep until he had found Daphne and thanked her for coming, He knew that his gratitude was very real. Her love had been his ultimate desire, and he believed that at last he had won it.

This train of thought occupied him while he stood at the window, and he would have pursued it still further but for a sound in the room which caused him to start suddenly, like one conscious of the presence of danger, and to tell himself that he was no longer alone. Unseen, unheard, another had entered there, and, having entered, had closed the door and locked it. Dudley perceived at a glance that it was Courvoisier. How he had come there, why he had come there, he knew no more than the

dead. Indeed, he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes, so humble was the man's attitude, so suggestive of that habit of obedience with which long service had endowed him. Yet of the truth there could be no lasting doubt. He was Courvoisier, and he had something to say.

"Mr. Hatton, I must speak to you, if you please."

Dudley seated himself upon the corner of the bare oak table and watched the man for many minutes without uttering a single word. It was apparent at once that, whatever were Courvoisier's present circumstances, they had not robbed him of a nice taste for good clothes. The dark cut-away coat must have come from a West End tailor; he had a diamond pin in his black scarf; he wore a silk hat and suède gloves; he did not carry any stick. At the very instant of recognition Dudley looked to see if there were a pistol in his hand, but his weapon was nothing but a sheet of paper, and that was folded.

"Well, what do you want?"

The words came clear and cold, with the old habit of authority which no servant, who has once served, is able to resist. Courvoisier released the door-handle and took off his hat. He advanced, holding it by the brim in both his hands.

"I wish to speak to you, sir, if you please."

"You have told me so. I am listening."

"Thank you, sir; I'm sure you're very kind to me. This is a dreadful night, Mr. Hatton."

"Since you have helped to make it so, you ought to know. Go on!"

The valet plucked up courage and put his hat upon the table. He knew what he wanted, and was not afraid to say it.

"It is a dreadful night, sir," he repeated; "but I think I could make it better. There's a road out of this shop, Mr. Hatton, and my friends have got the key. I should be very glad to think that you took it."

"Ah! money, I perceive! You want money, Courvoisier?"

"Frankly, sir, it is that! I want ten thousand pounds, for which I will sell you this paper."

He laid upon the table a thumbed and dirty cheque. It was the identical cheque which Dudley had given to the doctor on the day following his wife's death. The valet laid it down as though it had been a precious document, but Dudley did not even lift it from the table.

"Do you know, my man," said he, "how very big a rascal you are?"

Courvoisier looked at the crown of his hat, as though he read a name there.

"That's as people find me. I am dealing fairly with you to-night. Frankly, sir, my new employer,

Mr. Beckstein, doesn't suit. I'm back to the old one, and what I offer him is worth the money—that, and something else which goes with it!"

"Oh! there is something else, then?"

The man drew a step nearer, and almost whispered in Dudley's ear.

"Yes," he said, "there's something else, sir; it is about Lady Hermione!"

"Ah! about my wife!"

"Yes, sir, about the night she died."

He watched, as with an animal's eyes, the expression upon his master's face when the mask was at length cast aside and the bald truth revealed. Dudley knew in that instant why he had come and what his secret was. He could admit to himself that he would pay ten times the money to lift the shadow which had closed about his life. But to Courvoisier, the blackmailer, he would not pay a halfpenny.

"No," he said at last, "I am not a buyer, Courvoisier. Take your goods elsewhere."

"Ah! to my friends below, sir?"

"To your friends below—yes, if you have the chance."

He stepped back from the table and pointed with his finger to a glare of crimson light which rolled itself out upon the walls of the opposite houses like some golden curtain drawn upward from the

ground. Side by side, master and man beheld this dreadful omen and read it truly.

The mob, driven to the last point of madness, had fired the building. Already the flames raged in the sheds and offices below. Volumes of dense smoke rolled away over the deserted track and the squalid houses. Serpentine tongues of flame licked up the ancient woodwork and the flimsy walls. A mighty roar, the cataract of fire, silenced even those who had done the work and held them awestruck. Sobered men cried for aid. Women ran from the scene shrieking. Hoarse voices cried: "Save the master!"

The valet was the first to speak in this moment of surpassing peril. He had still wits enough to snatch his paper from the table and to play one desperate stroke for liberty; but Dudley was before him in the act, and his hands were about his throat ere he could take a second step.

"No—by God!" said that pitiless voice, "we'll see it out together—you and I, Courvoisier!"

He gripped the man in both his hands with that almost superhuman strength which desperation gave him. Foot by foot and inch by inch he dragged him to the window and forced him to look upon his handiwork. No woman could have raved as this wretched creature in that moment of retribution and of agony. His cries, men said, were like the

wailing of the damned. To and fro, terror in his eyes, the sweat upon his face, now half choked, now screaming like some stricken animal, he wrestled vainly with that terrible hand. But Dudley had him surely. He dragged him to the window, he pressed his face against the misted pane.

"Sell me your secret now—sell it me!" was the defiant cry.

Courvoisier fell back, half fainting, to the floor. He raved no longer. The fear of death, and such a death, drove the words from him one by one. Old beliefs, old superstitions, played upon a mind distraught. There, in the hour of judgment, he spoke as to a priest.

"Let me go—hear me! You were not guilty—I killed her—she threatened me—she found me at the door listening—I put my hand upon her throat to silence her; she died before I could get help—I did not wish to kill her!"

His voice failed him and he fell a huddled mass upon the boards. Dudley stood like one transfigured. He did not touch the man again. He could not utter a word. It was as though a great light shone out to him suddenly from a distant heaven. He was not guilty! he was not guilty!

"Go!" he said at last, "go! Hide your face from me!"

The man staggered to his feet, sobbing like a child.

Dumb with fear, he turned to the door he had locked and opened it violently ; but a vomit of smoke and flame, leaping with the draught, drove him shrieking to the window. None heard him ; none heeded him. Dudley forgot almost that he was there. Those devils of an hour ago—ah ! they did not curse the master's name now ! Wild cries echoed above the surges of the flame, resounding cheers were to be heard, the pity and the prayers of those who would have saved him. Dudley could not see the fire, but volumes of golden smoke, blown northward upon a breeze of the night, this and the crash of bursting floors and tumbling beams proclaimed the holocaust and declared its advance. He was astonished at his own calmness and the patience with which he surveyed the efforts of those who would have saved him. He would not claim the merit of it ; he did not fail to understand it. In truth it was another's courage, the courage of her who, white and wild with fear, looked up at him in mute farewell from that human sea below. Aye, he could send a message to Daphne now ! She would understand. She would understand and know why he had died.

A hundred hands dragged a ladder from a neighbouring yard and reared it against the wall of the doomed building. Many were ready to mount the ladder ; but one man, ever active in the crowd and

a leader, thrust others aside and went up with a seaman's foot. A tempest of cheers bore witness to the heroic act. The storm ebbed and died away, changing anon to a shuddering cry which declared that the ladder was too short. "He cannot reach the window," men said; "the master dies!" Ah! they did no justice to the unknown. No difficulty defied him; no danger appalled. Like some acrobat sent for the salvation of the doomed, he sets about his work, now balancing himself upon nimble feet, now poised upon the ladder's topmost rung, anon gripping the window-sill with tenacious fingers. He will! He will not! He is over! He is down! Five thousand at last tell you as one that he has gained the window and the room. The crowd sees all things as upon some lurid stage far above in the crimson light. There are figures at the window; men wrestling with men; shadows upon the curtain of the smoke; a wild creature climbing out when others would hold him back, and feeling for the ladder with uncertain feet. God help the fellow, they say, for he has missed his hold and fallen headlong! Bent over the huddled body, men tell you it is not the master, but the servant. For the second time a man is helped to the ladder; a rope is about his waist; he does not hurry, he measures every step. The sailor at the window cries: "Be careful, sir, be careful!" And Dud-

ley answers: "Thank you, Mr. Garth; I think I can manage it!"

* * * * *

The crowd, released as from some spell, proclaimed with five thousand throats that he was safe. He lay senseless at the ladder's foot, and a woman wept upon his heart.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEYOND THE VALLEY

THE steam-yacht *Diadem* lay out in the Solent, cradled upon a glassy sea. It was the last day of the month of October, and the blue-peter at the masthead spoke of a journey to the South and a winter shore. On the hither water the yacht's launch, ploughing gallantly towards Portsmouth and the harbour, carried our old friends Patrick Foxall and Romer Hatton upon a trivial errand. Dudley himself, drawing little Daphne to his side, watched them go and hazarded the opinion that they were a pretty pair.

"There's not a truer man afloat than old Pat this day," said he with much affection. "We'll never forget what we owe to him, little Daph; we couldn't do that if we tried."

She laid her cheek upon his arm and answered as he wished—

"They were your friends—how could I forget them?"

"Old Pat will come to shoot with us if we're back in December," he continued presently. "I've

written to the agent to-day to say I must have Wolcott Hall if money can buy it. You'll like Derbyshire, Daph ; you'll like the hunting and the people, and the house itself—it's just one of those great boxes which ought to have the ghosts of half a dozen kings in them. After all, a man does best to make his home in his own country. The other thing is mere affectation or—gout. I shall live in England and teach Romer that two and two make five in Drapers' Gardens. He'll have the business —let's trust it will keep him in collars."

Daphne laughed brightly ; and the launch having entered the harbour by this time, they began to walk up and down the deck together and to speak further of their plans. In the saloon below, Beryl Garth played "Iolanthe" with her own variations. The sea was like a silver mirror ; a blue sky gave an immense heaven ; the autumnal breeze was still the child of summer. Dudley did not dare to think of that which to-morrow must mean. The seamen below were trying on their new "kits" for the wedding. From hour to hour boats were rowed out from Portsmouth, each bearing a new gift from those who had heard the rumour. To Dudley it seemed that an immense gulf lay between him and the terrible months. He never spoke of them—unless it were to say that through them he had won happiness.

"Yes," he went on reflectively, "the gold wolf is killed, Daph, and we have buried him together. I shall not give up my business—but all that was ignoble in it will go. You'll help me to do that, Daph; and we'll work together——"

"Always, dear Dudley, I will try to help you always."

His hand closed upon hers in a gesture of gratitude, and he said—

"There's so much a fortune like mine could do. I've been thinking of it these last few weeks, Daph—illness is a fine philosopher. When you're down on your luck, doing nothing, you begin to see things as they really are."

She looked up at him mischievously—

"I was there every day, Dudley."

He kissed her to silence.

"Of course you were, Daph. God knows what would have happened to me if you had stopped away. But that's not the point. I mean to say that a rich man who does not use his opportunities, who does not make opportunities, work and strive as in his own business for the greater business of humanity, is little short of a scoundrel. That's going to be my market, now, Daph. I want to see the poor man's scrip go up. I want to see a rise in the children's securities. There's where you can help me—there's where a clever woman comes in."

"But I'm not a clever woman, dear Dudley; I'm just a very ordinary mortal who used to think a lot of romantic rubbish, and doesn't think of it any more, because somebody's taught me what reality is. But, of course, I mean to try. Even the common mortal may do that."

"We'll work together, Daph. We shall find plenty of time. It's not going to hang upon our hands, anyway."

"It couldn't, dear Dudley—not while you hold them so."

He caught her mood, and caring nothing that the ships should be his witness, he kissed her forehead and said that to-morrow she would be his wife.

"To-morrow, little Daph! Say that you won't run away to-night."

"The world's not big enough for that, dear. You'd find me wherever I was."

"Yes, yes; wherever you were. You believe it now, Daph?"

"And bring me home again."

"And say, 'Thank God for little Daph!'"

The sun shone down upon them, the placid sea droned its summer song; they were alone upon the deck. The evil of the darker days was forgotten, and, heart to heart, they said "To-morrow!"

* * * * *

Now, while these things were happening upon the

deck of the yacht, old Pat Foxall made straight for the best hotel in Portsmouth town, and as he went, he asked Romer what Dudley meant to do for Rhoderick Garth.

"He owes his life to that same honest body, and is not the man to reward him with the half of a three-penny bit. 'Twill be a difficult business, for there's the little girl to look after."

Romer did not see it in this light.

"He's going to make him land agent, or something, at Wolcott Hall, if he gets the place. It was just like Dudley to employ him on the railway and say nothing about it. Of course, there was that nasty affair down in Cornwall, but Dudley thinks he can square it at Whitehall. We shall keep Beryl, though they must not be altogether separated. We are under some obligations in the matter."

Old Pat, cocking an eye maliciously, said: "Obligation, indeed! Ye regard yerself as a father to that same young lady now?"

"In a measure, yes, Pat."

"In a measure!"

It amused old Pat very much.

"Bow-wow!" said he.

THE END.

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.

Novels by Guy Boothby.

SPECIAL AND ORIGINAL DESIGNS.

Each volume attractively Illustrated by Stanley L. Wood and others.

Crown 8vo, Cloth Gilt, Trimmed Edges, **5s.**

THE KIDNAPPED PRESIDENT

MY STRANGEST CASE

FAREWELL, NIKOLA!

SHEILAH McLEOD

MY INDIAN QUEEN

LONG LIVE THE KING!

A SAILOR'S BRIDE

A PRINCE OF SWINDLERS

A MAKER OF NATIONS

THE RED RAT'S DAUGHTER

LOVE MADE MANIFEST

PHAROS, THE EGYPTIAN

ACROSS THE WORLD FOR A WIFE

THE LUST OF HATE

BUSHIGRAMS

THE FASCINATION OF THE KING

DR. NIKOLA

THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL

A BID FOR FORTUNE or, Dr. Nikola's Vendetta

IN STRANGE COMPANY: A Story of Chili and the Southern Seas

THE MARRIAGE OF ESTHER: A Torres Straits Sketch.

CONNIE BURT

London: WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED.

WORKS BY

E. Phillips Oppenheim.

The Illustrated London News says:—"Humdrum is the very last word you could apply to (a tale by) E. P. Oppenheim, which reminds you of one of those Chinese nests of boxes, one inside the other. You have plot within plot, wheel within wheel, mystery within mystery, till you are almost dizzy."

The British Weekly says:—"Mr. Oppenheim has boundless imagination and distinct skill. He paints in broad, vivid colours; yet, audacious as he is, he never outsteps the possible. There is good thrilling mystery in his books, and not a few excellent characters."

THE GREAT AWAKENING.
Illustrated by F. H. TOWNSEND. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **6s.**

THE SURVIVOR.
Illustrated by STANLEY L. WOOD. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **6s.**

A MILLIONAIRE OF YESTERDAY.
Illustrated by STANLEY L. WOOD. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **6s.**

THE MYSTERY OF MR. BERNARD BROWN.
Illustrated. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

THE WORLD'S GREAT SNARE.
Illustrated by J. AMBROSE WALTON. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

A DAUGHTER OF THE MARIONIS.
Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

THE MAN AND HIS KINGDOM.
Illustrated by J. AMBROSE WALTON. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

MYSTERIOUS MR. SABIN.
Illustrated by J. AMBROSE WALTON. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

AS A MAN LIVES.
Illustrated by STANLEY L. WOOD. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

A MONK OF CRUTA.
Illustrated by WARNE BROWNE. Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **3s. 6d.**

PRINCE OF SINNERS

LONDON: WARD, LOCK & CO., LTD.